From the Creator of *FAKE*

2

sanami matoh

SWORD of the

01

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Graphic Novel/Manga
Adventure
USA $9.99
MYO/002

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SWORD BY THE

sanami matoh presents

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BE SAFE, MIZUKI.
YOU HAVE UNTIL THE NEXT FULL MOON.
AND BE WARY OF HUMANS.

SPLSH
SPLSH

SSHHH

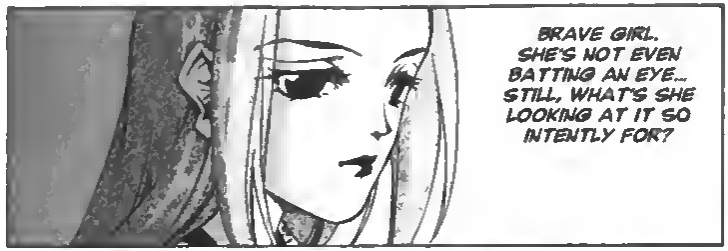
SSHHH

WHAT?! NO SHIPS ARE GOING OUT TODAY?
WELL, WHEN IS ONE GOING OUT?
COULDN'T TELL YA.
LOOKS PRETTY CALM TO ME.
SSHHH
SEA'S BEEN ROUGH.
UH... WHY?
"ROUGH"?

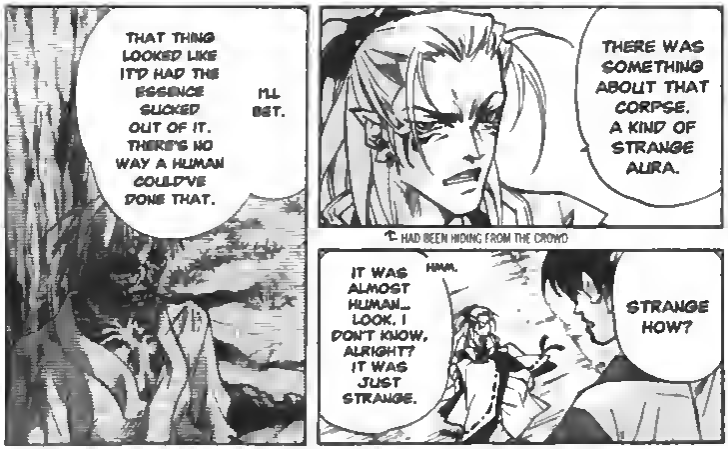
DRAGON GOD, HUH?
THERE'S RUMORS GOING 'ROUND THAT THE DRAGON GOD IS UPSET.
FOR TEN DAYS NOW WE'VE BEEN TAKIN' SHIPS OUT ONLY TO HAVE 'EM TURN BACK AROUND BEIN TERRIBLE FOR BUSINESS.
IT TURNS ROUGH ONCE YOU GET FARTHER OUT.
ASAGI!
THERE'S SOME DEAD GUY OVER THERE!
EVERYTHING ALRIGHT?
TAP
TAP

IT LOOKS LIKE A DRIED-UP PIECE OF FISH OR SOMETHING!
He's all wrinkly
THIS IS A CORPSE?
YEECH
THERE'S NO WAY A HUMAN DID THIS.

EVERYONE'S SAYING A DEMON DID IT.
THAT ARMBAND... YOU'RE A KARIMI
I GET IT
SEE THIS?
IF THIS WAS A DEMON, I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT.
EXCUSE US
EVERYONE, CLEAR THE WAY! HE'S A KARIMI!
HEY, WAIT YOUR TURN!
THERE'S RULES, Y'KNOW
MIND IF I TAKE A LOOK?


BRAVE GIRL. SHE'S NOT EVEN BATTING AN EYE... STILL, WHAT'S SHE LOOKING AT IT SO INTENTLY FOR?

flip
UH-OH. GUESS I WAS STARING AT HER.


THAT THING LOOKED LIKE IT'D HAD THE ESSENCE SUCKED OUT OF IT. THERE'S NO WAY A HUMAN COULD'VE DONE THAT.
I'LL BET.
THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THAT CORPSE. A KIND OF STRANGE AURA.
(I HAD BEEN HIDING FROM THE CROWD)
HMM.
IT WAS ALMOST HUMAN... LOOK, I DON'T KNOW, ALRIGHT? IT WAS JUST STRANGE.
STRANGE HOW?

RIGHT?
SO IT WAS KINDA DEMONIC, THEN?
YES, "KINDA." THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT STRANGE, YA MORON.
HM. THERE WAS A DEMONIC FEEL TO THAT AURA, BUT NOT ENOUGH FOR IT TO HAVE BEEN AN ACTUAL DEMON.

stare
KAEDE? WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING AT?
STILL, THERE WAS SOMETHING ALMOST FAMILIAR ABOUT IT...

OH COME ON
ISN'T IT A LITTLE SOON FOR THAT?
WHAT?!
WHOEVER YOU ARE, GET OUT HERE NOW OR I'M GONNA FIREBALL YOUR ASS!
WHOOF

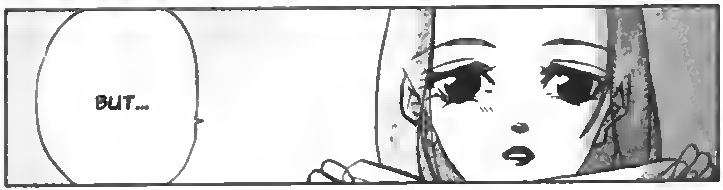
BOOM!

THERE'S SOMEBODY OUT THERE!

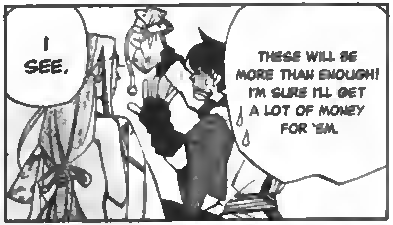
WHAT?! YOU KNOW WHO DID THIS?
I WISH TO CATCH THE ONE RESPONSIBLE.
YEAH.
YOU SAW THE CORPSE. WHAT BECAME OF THAT MAN...
HE TOOK SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT FROM US, AND WE MUST HAVE IT BACK. PLEASE, LEND US YOUR ASSISTANCE.
I DO.
UH-OH. IF THE SHIPS AREN'T LEAVING PORT, WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO STAY HERE FOR A WHILE. WHICH MEANS I'M GONNA HAVE TO EARN SOME MONEY TO BUY FOOD.
WELL, UH, HERE'S THE THING...
THOSE GUYS EAT A TON!

?
IT'S YOU. THE GIRL FROM EARLIER...
MY NAME IS MIZUKI.
YES, I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK, KARIN.
HUH?
A FAVOR?
I'M ASAGI. SO, YOU SAID YOU HAD SOMETHIN' YOU WANTED TO TALK ABOUT?

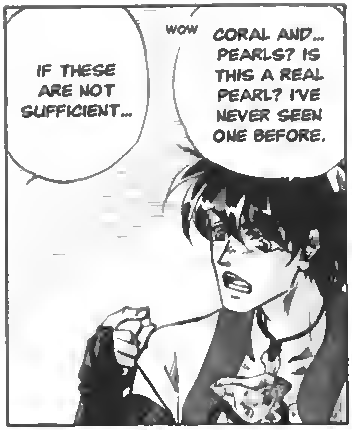
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?! YOU CAN'T JUST WALK AROUND SAYING THINGS LIKE THAT!
NO, NO! NO!
GASH!


BUT...

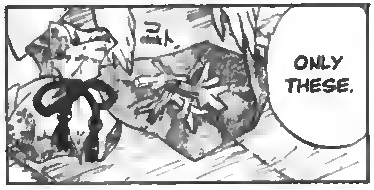
UH, YEAH. YOU TAKE CARE, NOW.
THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP.
VERY WELL. I WILL BE BACK IN THE MORNING.
WHAT IS WITH THIS GIRL?


I SEE.
THESE WILL BE MORE THAN ENOUGH! I'M SURE I'LL GET A LOT OF MONEY FOR 'EM.

WHAT DO YOU SAY WE PICK THIS UP TOMORROW, HUH?
L-LOOK, IT'S GETTING LATE.

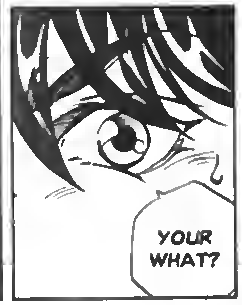

IF THESE ARE NOT SUFFICIENT...
WOW
CORAL AND... PEARLS? IS THIS A REAL PEARL? I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE BEFORE.

I SHOULD TELL YOU, I CANNOT OFFER YOU MONEY.
I'D LIKE TO HELP YOU AND ALL, BUT...


ONLY THESE.

WAAUGH!

I ALSO OFFER YOU MY BODY.


YOUR WHAT?

WHAT HAS SHE GOT THAT I DON'T?!
WH-WHAT'S WITH YOU?
(ASAGI SPEAKING)
HA HA
UH...AHEM! I JUST, I MEAN, YOU DON'T SEE SOMETHING LIKE, PEOPLE DON'T SHOW YOU SOMETHING LIKE THAT EVERY DAY! SO THAT WAS, UH...NICE?
YEAH, I GUESS THAT'S PART OF IT.
You still got some growin up to do
HMM.
YOU'RE STILL JUST A KID
IT AIN'T THE SAME, ASAGI, SURE YOU'VE GOT THE SAME PARTS, BUT A WOMAN LIKE THAT'S GOT SEX APPEAL.
GAH! DON'T TAKE YOUR CLOTHES OFF, IDIOT!
THAT'S IT!
BUNCH
I HAVE.
HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?! YOU'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN WHAT I'VE GOT!

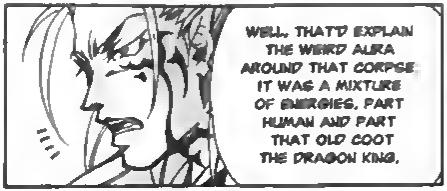
DO NOT LET YOURSELF BE TAKEN IN BY MAN
BE SAFE, MIZUKI AND BE WARY OF HUMANS
HE SEEMED DIFFERENT, THOUGH...
HUH?!
YOU ALRIGHT, ASAGI? YOU'RE BLUSHING.
SIGH
GOOD GOD, THE WOMAN THROWS HERSELF AT YOU AND YOU HAND HER HER ROBE? HOW STUPID CAN YOU GET?
URK
WAS OUTSIDE PEEKING IN
H-HEY! WHY DON'T YOU WATCH YOUR MOUTH, OLD MAN?!
WHAT ABOUT FUYO, HUH?
AND SHE WAS SO PRETTY! I WOULD'VE BEEN ALL OVER THAT!

AAGH!!
SHWOO
AA
Hey, look!
I made me some MAN jerky!
HEH HEH.
HA HA HA HA!
I TELL YA, IT'S JUST SO EASY BEIN' A THIEF! BWAHAHA!
WELL, WELL. CARRYING SOME PRETTY EXPENSIVE STUFF, ARE WE?

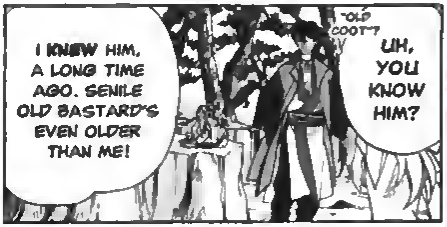
THAT'S QUITE ALRIGHT. I'M FINE NOW THAT YOU'RE HERE.
EXCUSE ME.
IF YOU'RE NOT FEELING WELL, I HAVE SOME MEDICINE I COULD SHARE WITH YOU.
GRAB
GRAARGH
THWMP

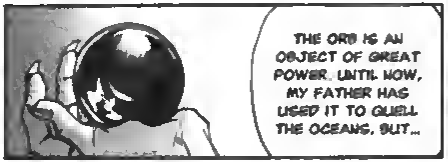
YOU'RE ASKING US FOR HELP, BUT IT'S CLEAR THAT YOU DON'T TRUST US.
I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU TOLD US WHAT YOU KNOW, MISSY.
OH.
C'MON, NOW. YOU MAKE IT SOUND LIKE SHE'S NOT HUMAN.
YOU WERE TOLD NOT TO TRUST HUMANS, IS THAT IT?
IT'S FAINT, BUT THERE'S AN AURA AROUND HER-- AND IT ISN'T HUMAN.

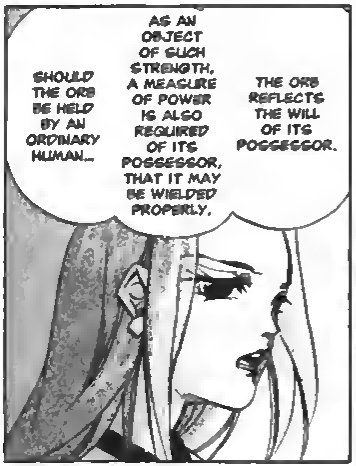
THIS ORB HAS TURNED OUT TO BE PRETTY USEFUL.
IT'S WEIRD THAT A DEMON WOULD BE AFTER MONEY.
NOT UNHEARD OF, BUT WEIRD.
THE VICTIM WAS STRIPPED OF ANY VALUABLES, SAME AS YESTERDAY.
IT'S THE SAME M.O.


WELL, THAT'D EXPLAIN THE WEIRD AURA AROUND THAT CORPSE. IT WAS A MIXTURE OF ENERGIES, PART HUMAN AND PART THAT OLD COOT THE DRAGON KING.

THERE'S MORE. THE BANDIT STOLE SOMETHING FROM MY FATHER--THE DRAGON ORB.

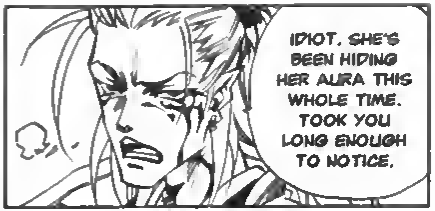

I KNEW HIM, A LONG TIME AGO. SENILE OLD BASTARD'S EVEN OLDER THAN ME!
"OLD COOT"?
UH, YOU KNOW HIM?

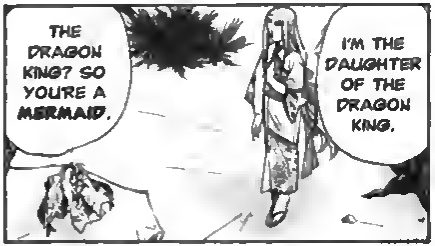

THE ORB IS AN OBJECT OF GREAT POWER. UNTIL NOW, MY FATHER HAS USED IT TO QUELL THE OCEANS, BUT...


SHOULD THE ORB BE HELD BY AN ORDINARY HUMAN...
AS AN OBJECT OF SUCH STRENGTH, A MEASURE OF POWER IS ALSO REQUIRED OF ITS POSSESSOR, THAT IT MAY BE WIELDED PROPERLY.
THE ORB REFLECTS THE WILL OF ITS POSSESSOR.

YES. SO LONG AS THE ORB REMAINS MISSING, THE OCEANS CANNOT BE CALMED.
SO THAT'S WHY THE SEA'S BEEN SO ROUGH LATELY? AND WHY THE BOATS CAN'T SAIL OUT TOO FAR?

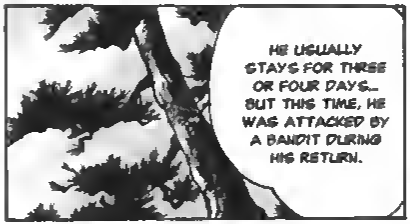
A MER-MAID...

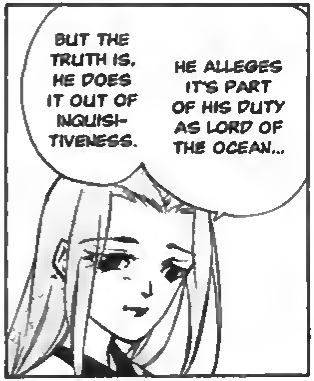

IDIOT. SHE'S BEEN HIDING HER AURA THIS WHOLE TIME. TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH TO NOTICE.


THE DRAGON KING? SO YOU'RE A MERMAID.
I'M THE DAUGHTER OF THE DRAGON KING.

WHY?
DRAGON KING
FOR MANY YEARS, MY FATHER HAS TAKEN HUMAN FORM AND VISITED THE TOWNS AND VILLAGES OF THIS LAND.

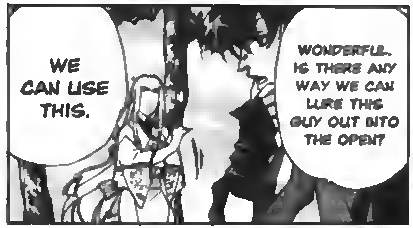
IT MEANS HE'S CURIOUS.
WHAT'S "IN QUISI-TIVENESS"?

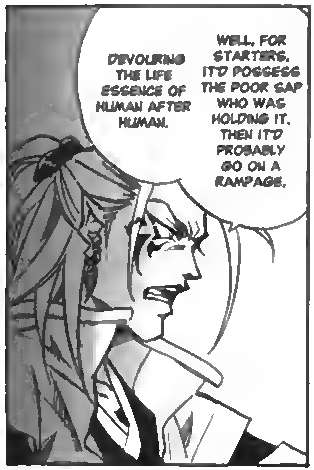

HE USUALLY STAYS FOR THREE OR FOUR DAYS... BUT THIS TIME, HE WAS ATTACKED BY A BANDIT DURING HIS RETURN.

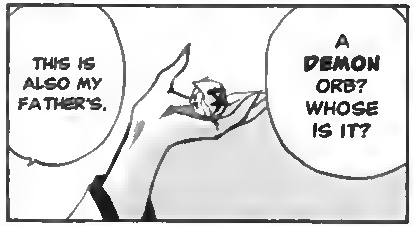

BUT THE TRUTH IS, HE DOES IT OUT OF INQUISI-TIVENESS.
HE ALLEGES IT'S PART OF HIS DUTY AS LORD OF THE OCEAN...

OK, HERE'S THE PLAN. WE LURE HIM OUT AFTER SUNDOWN...
WE ARE?
WE ARE ALMOST OUT OF TIME.
THAT WAY, NO ONE CAN SEE WHAT'S GOING ON.

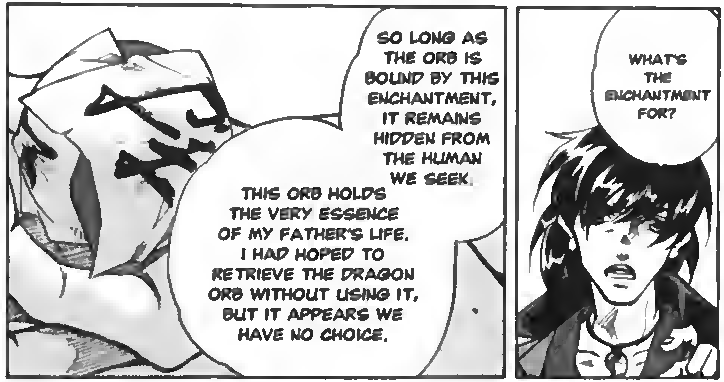
HEY, I DON'T BLAME YOU. A LOT OF PEOPLE DO TERRIBLE THINGS TO ANYONE WHO'S NOT HUMAN.
I APOLOGIZE FOR NOT TELLING YOU THE TRUTH.
ASAGI.
HUH? OH, MIZUKI.

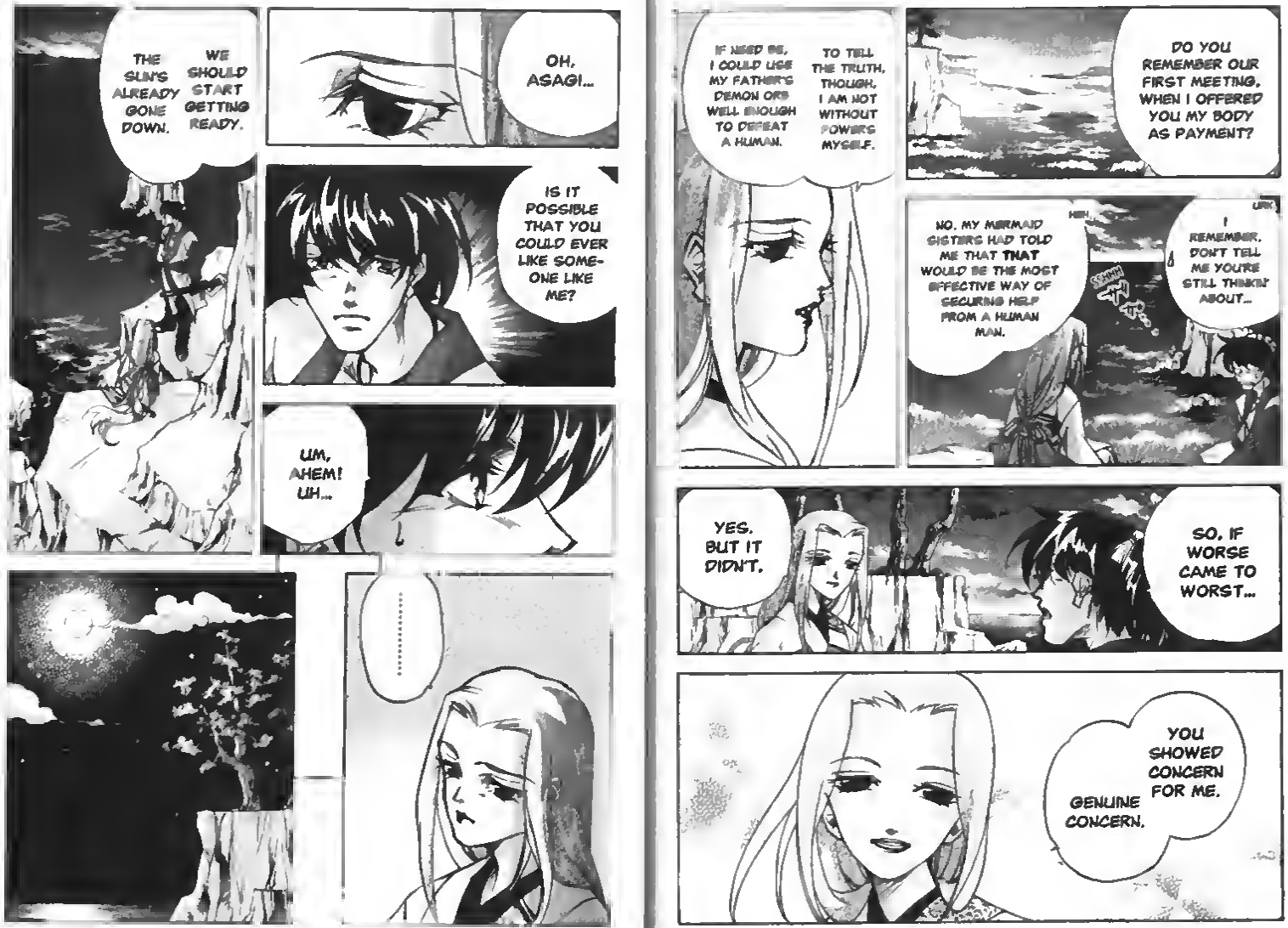

WE CAN USE THIS.
WONDERFUL. IS THERE ANY WAY WE CAN LURE THIS GUY OUT INTO THE OPEN?

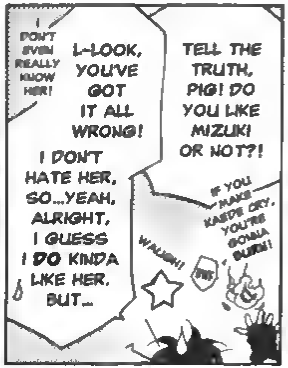

DEVOURING THE LIFE ESSENCE OF HUMAN AFTER HUMAN.
WELL, FOR STARTERS, IT'D POSSESS THE POOR SAP WHO WAS HOLDING IT. THEN IT'D PROBABLY GO ON A RAMPAGE.


THIS IS ALSO MY FATHER'S.
A DEMON ORB? WHOSE IS IT?

THE DRAGON ORB WILL RESPOND TO THE ENERGIES OF THIS ORB. I AM SURE IT WILL COME TO US.


SO LONG AS THE ORB IS BOUND BY THIS ENCHANTMENT, IT REMAINS HIDDEN FROM THE HUMAN WE SEEK.
THIS ORB HOLDS THE VERY ESSENCE OF MY FATHER'S LIFE. I HAD HOPED TO RETRIEVE THE DRAGON ORB WITHOUT USING IT, BUT IT APPEARS WE HAVE NO CHOICE.
WHAT'S THE ENCHANTMENT FOR?


IF NEED BE, I COULD USE MY FATHER'S DEMON ORB WELL ENOUGH TO DEFEAT A HUMAN.
TO TELL THE TRUTH, THOUGH, I AM NOT WITHOUT POWERS MYSELF.
DO YOU REMEMBER OUR FIRST MEETING, WHEN I OFFERED YOU MY BODY AS PAYMENT?
NO. MY MERMAID SISTERS HAD TOLD ME THAT THAT WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF SECURING HELP FROM A HUMAN MAN.
HEH.
I REMEMBER. DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE STILL THINKIN' ABOUT...
URK
YES. BUT IT DIDN'T.
SO, IF WORSE CAME TO WORST...
YOU SHOWED CONCERN FOR ME.
GENUINE CONCERN.
THE SUN'S ALREADY GONE DOWN.
WE SHOULD START GETTING READY.
OH, ASAGI...
IS IT POSSIBLE THAT YOU COULD EVER LIKE SOMEONE LIKE ME?
UM, AHEM! UH...
.....


I DON'T EVEN REALLY KNOW HER!
L-LOOK, YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG!
I DON'T HATE HER, SO...YEAH, ALRIGHT, I GUESS I DO KINDA LIKE HER, BUT...
TELL THE TRUTH, PIG! DO YOU LIKE MIZUKI OR NOT?!
IF YOU MAKE KAEDE CRY, YOU'RE GONNA BURN!
WAUGH!
FWK

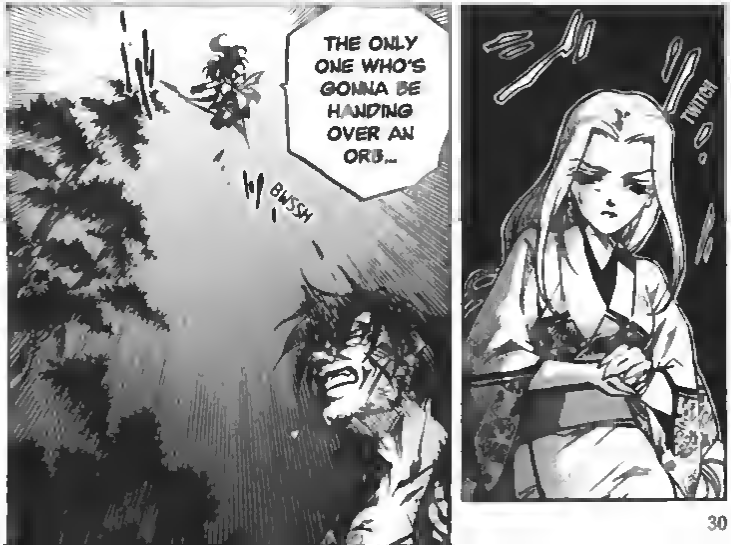
↑ POSSESSED BY KURENAI

YOU'RE JUST LUCKY KAEDE WASN'T THERE.
VOICES CARRY, MORON. I DIDN'T HAVE TO EAVES-DROP.
H-HEY! WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA, EAVES-DROPPING LIKE THAT?!
SHE WOULD'VE GONE BALLISTIC.

BWFF
GRAAURGH!
IS YOU!
-SQCP0
BASSH

HAND OVER THAT ORB.
HERE HE COMES!
BLAM!

ASAGI! NOW!
SKESHH


THE ONLY ONE WHO'S GONNA BE HANDING OVER AN ORB...
BWSSH
TWITCH

SKLESH
NO! DON'T TOUCH THE ORB!
KURENAI!
AAUGH!
GSKRK
GSKRK
SKLESH

THE SWORD... IT'S EMITTING FLAME!
clench
VWORRR
RRAAARGH!

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO, THEN?!
ASAGI...
IF YOU TOUCH IT, IT WILL POSSESS YOU, TOO!
WAIT! THE ORB STILL RETAINS THAT MAN'S EVIL!
KAEDE!
SO IT SHOULD HAVE A WEAK-NESS TO FIRE.
THE ORB HAS ITS ORIGINS IN WATER, RIGHT?
dash
KAEDE!
AAURGH!
crnk

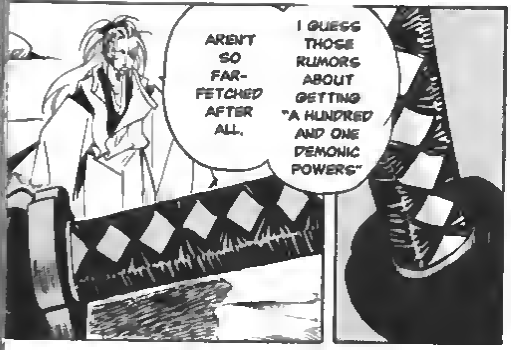
GWORRR
BWOOF!

BWSSSH

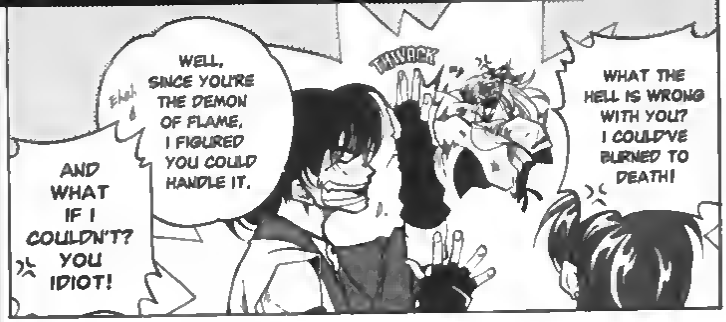
I'M SORRY I HAD TO DO THAT. DID IT HURT?
A LITTLE. I'M OK, THOUGH.
KORE
ASA... GI?
PHEWE
ASAGI! YOU BASTARD!
GLARE
GIH

GWISH
PLIP
ARE YOU ALRIGHT?! SAY SOMETHING!
KAEDE!
HNGH...
KUNIE

BWSSSH
IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT'D EVER HAPPENED.
THAT'S WHEN ALL THAT FIRE CAME OUT OF THE MOEGI.


I GUESS THOSE RUMORS ABOUT GETTING "A HUNDRED AND ONE DEMONIC POWERS" AREN'T SO FAR-FETCHED AFTER ALL.

WELL, WELL.


WELL, SINCE YOU'RE THE DEMON OF FLAME, I FIGURED YOU COULD HANDLE IT.
AND WHAT IF I COULDN'T? YOU IDIOT!
THWACK
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU? I COULD'VE BURNED TO DEATH!

HOW DID YOU EVEN DO THAT ANYWAY?

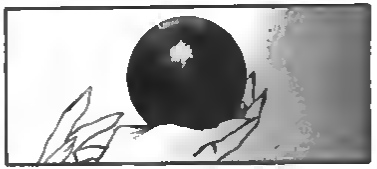
AND I FELT THE ENERGY IN MY BODY START TO BURN
THEN, IT'S LIKE THAT ENERGY WENT INTO THE SWORD AND BECAME EVEN STRONGER

I REMEMBER BEING ANGRY...
IT'S KINDA FUZZY.

PAT
I SAID I'D HELP HER LOOK FOR HER FATHER, AND IN MY MIND, I...
I MADE A PROMISE TO HER WHEN WE STARTED THIS JOURNEY.
NO MATTER WHAT.
I PROMISED THAT I'D STAY BY HER SIDE,

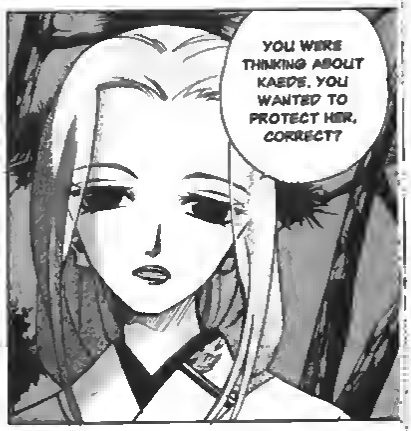
IT WILL RETURN TO NORMAL ONCE IT RECEIVES MY FATHER'S ENERGY.
NOT TO WORRY.
OH, NO. IT'S BLACK!
That thing's been TAINTED

OH!
MIZUKI, IS THE ORB ALRIGHT?

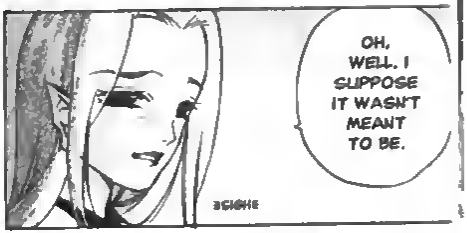


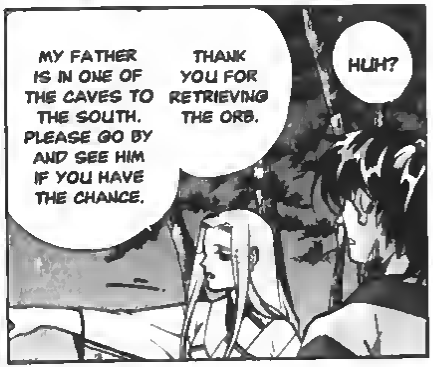
I-I'M SORRY. I SHOULD'VE THOUGHT BEFORE I THREW ALL THAT FIRE AT IT...

I...


YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT KAEDE, YOU WANTED TO PROTECT HER, CORRECT?

I HAVE TO GO BACK SOON.
MY BODY RETURNS TO NORMAL ON THE NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON.


OH, WELL, I SUPPOSE IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE.
SIGH

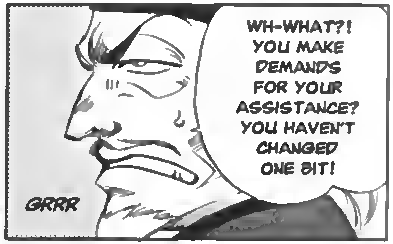

HUH?
THANK YOU FOR RETRIEVING THE ORB.
MY FATHER IS IN ONE OF THE CAVES TO THE SOUTH. PLEASE GO BY AND SEE HIM IF YOU HAVE THE CHANCE.

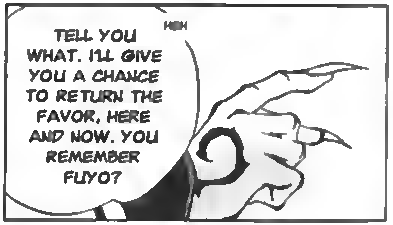
thip

THE FULL MOON? THAT'S TONIGHT.

OH, I WAS HAPPY TO HELP-- SO THAT I'D HAVE YOU IN MY DEBT!
TO THANK YOU FOR HELPING HIS DAUGHTER
YES, WELL, THIS OLD FOSSIL WOULD LIKE
BACK AT YA, YOU OLD FOSSIL.

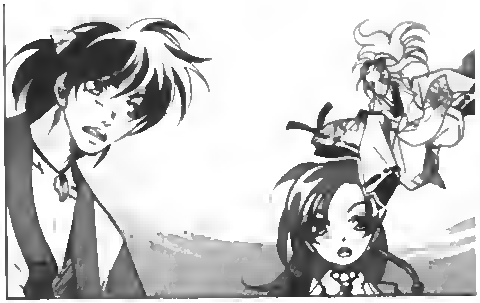
YOU TWO USED TO TALK ALL THE TIME, DIDN'T YOU?
STUFF IT!
FUYO? YES, INDEED, A SPLENDID WOMAN... FAR TOO GOOD TO BE YOUR WIFE!
BAP

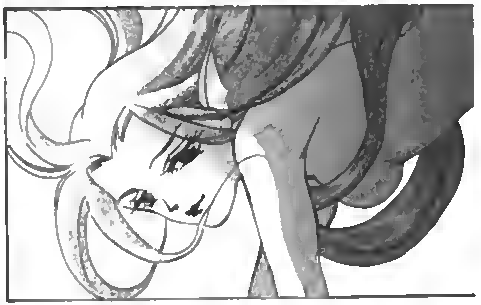

WH-WHAT?! YOU MAKE DEMANDS FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE? YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED ONE BIT!
GRRR


TELL YOU WHAT. I'LL GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO RETURN THE FAVOR, HERE AND NOW. YOU REMEMBER FUYO?
HEH

AND I WANT YOU TO TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW.
YOU MUST KNOW A LOT ABOUT HER...

SPLSH



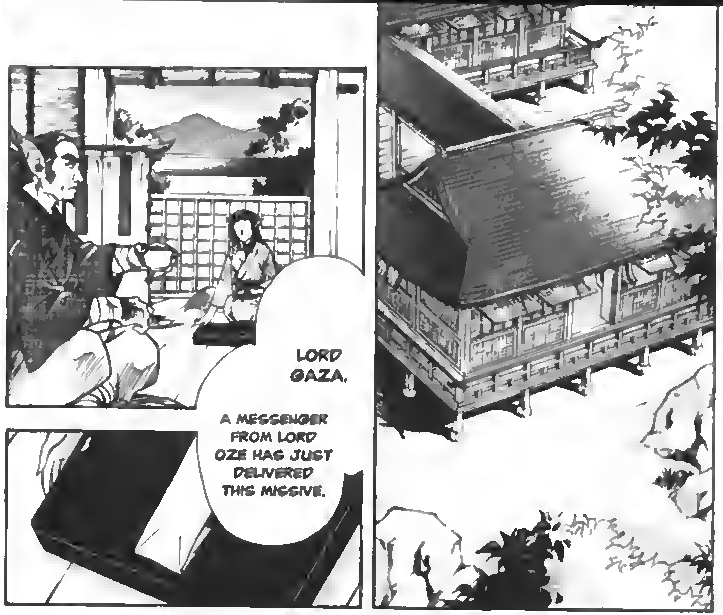


IT'S BEEN A WHILE, KURENAI. I'M SURPRISED YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, KAEDE?
I'M CRAZY ABOUT HIM.
OF COURSE.
GOODBYE, KAEDE. TAKE CARE.
SPLASH
?
WHICH IS WHY FOR ME, IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE.
GRIN

YOU ARE ALL FINISHED HERE, THEN?
KAEDE! WE'RE LEAVING.
DON'T YOU WANT TO SAY GOODBYE?
HE'S RIGHT OVER THERE AT THE DOCK.
PLEASE GIVE ASAGI MY REGARDS.
HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY.
NO, THAT'S ALRIGHT.
DO YOU LIKE ASAGI?

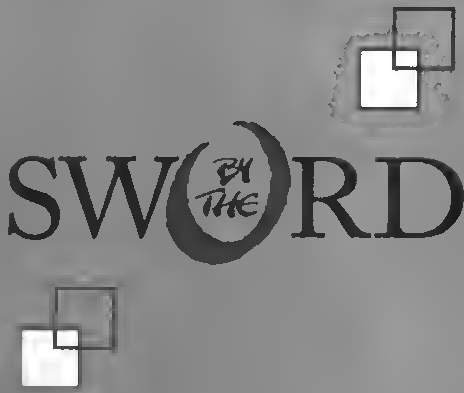
CHAPTER 1: MERMAID / THE END

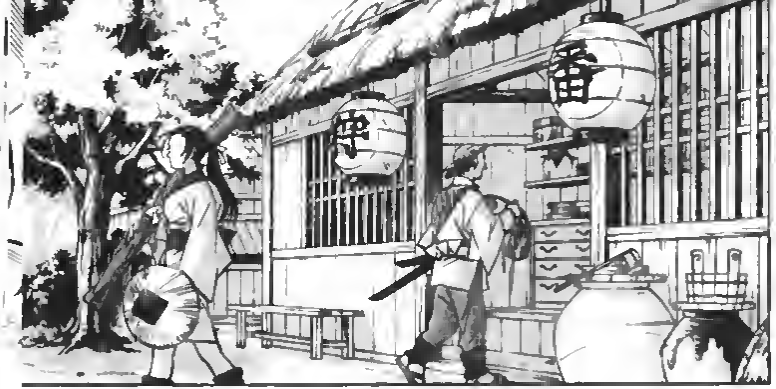

LORD GAZA.
A MESSENGER FROM LORD OZE HAS JUST DELIVERED THIS MISSIVE.

SO...
HE'S COMING AT LAST, EH?

YES, SIR.
FETCH AOI FOR ME, WOULD YOU?

SWORD BY THE





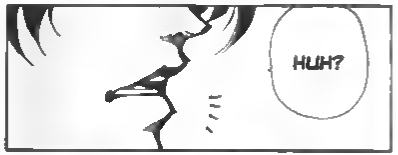
CHAPTER 2: AOI

ASAGI, I'M HUNGRY.
ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS MAKE IT THROUGH THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS AND WE'LL BE FINE
SHUT UP!
WHY DO WE NEVER HAVE ENOUGH MONEY FOR FOOD?
I guess the answer's obvious though
SIGHH
GROWWWW
YOU SOUND MORE LIKE A CHILD THAN A MAN!
OH YEAH? WHO DO YOU THINK MAKES ME HAVE TO GO ON ABOUT EVERY LITTLE THING, HUH?!
WILL YOU GIVE IT A REST ALREADY?! YOU'RE ALWAYS GOIN' ON ABOUT EVERY STUPID LITTLE THING!
I TOLD YOU NOT TO EAT SO MUCH ON THE SHIP, DIDN'T I? BUT NO!
HEY, ASAGI! DAD!
SHUT UP!

WAAUGH!
YIKES!
UH-OH.
THIS COULD BE BAD.
OH, NO
IS SHE A GIRL OR A BEAST?
TH-THAT WAS A HOWL.
GRRR...
BUMP
OW!

AAAUUGHH!!

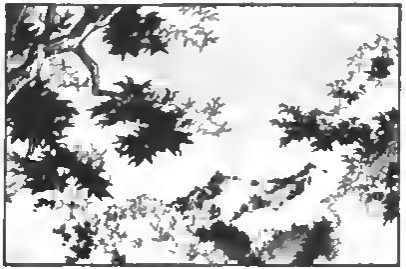
JEEZ. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM THIS TIME?


HUH?

THIS WAY.
WHAT WAS THAT?!

KAEDE! IF YOU'RE THERE, ANSWER ME!
RUSTLE
HEY, IS SOMEONE THERE?

A-ALWAYS THIS HAPPENS! HE EATS SO MUCH. WHY HE CAN'T CARRY HIS OWN FOOD?!



FLAP
FLAP
FLAP

I DON'T EAT ONE TENTH THIS!
it's not fair

EEK!

WHY IS IT SO DARK ALL OF A SUDDEN?

HM?

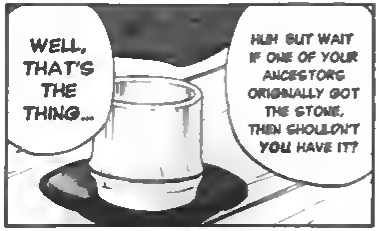
THE DEMON-STONE?
飯屋
WHOA. SOUNDS LIKE A PRETTY MANLY GUY.
DEMON WOLF
THE HEAD OF A CLAN OF DEMON WOLVES HEARD OF HIM AND CHALLENGED HIM TO A DUEL.
APPARENTLY, ONE OF MY ANCESTORS WAS KNOWN AS THE BEST SPEAR WIELDER IN ALL JAPAN.
THAT'S RIGHT.
MY ANCES-TOR.
WISH I COULD'VE SEEN IT.
ANY-WAY, WHO WON?
HE GAVE HIM THE DEMON-STONE.
AS A TOKEN OF FRIEND-SHIP...
BUT THE WOLFMAN WAS IMPRESSED BY MY ANCESTOR'S SKILL AND STRENGTH OF CHARACTER.

HUH?

AH!

BLGH!

WE MEET AGAIN.


WELL, THAT'S THE THING...
HUH BUT WAIT IF ONE OF YOUR ANCESTORS ORIGINALLY GOT THE STONE, THEN SHOULDN'T YOU HAVE IT?

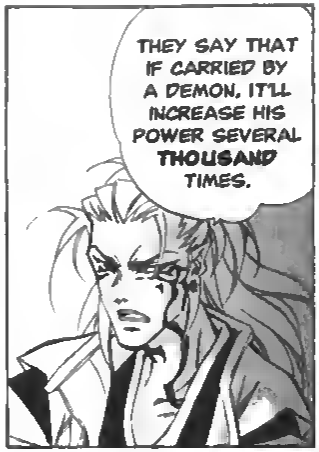
THERE AREN'T MANY THAT CAN, THOUGH.
DEPENDS ON THE PRIEST.
WHOA, PRIESTS CAN GET RID OF DEMON ORBS?

FLASHBACK

I HAVE SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO TELL YOU
ONCE YOU'VE FINISHED YOUR TRAINING AND BECOME A *KARININ*, THE FIRST THING YOU MUST DO IS COME STRAIGHT HOME

NOW THEN, SUOH.

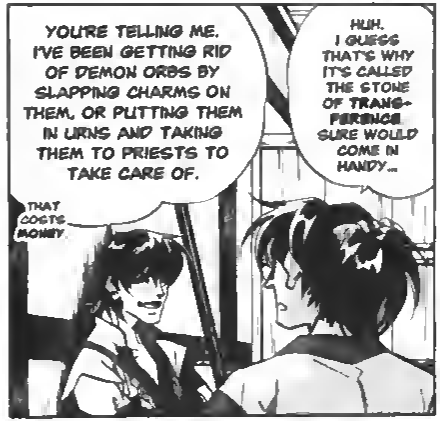
SUOH AT AGE TEN
OK GRANDPA. I'LL COME RIGHT BACK!


THEY SAY THAT IF CARRIED BY A DEMON, IT'LL INCREASE HIS POWER SEVERAL THOUSAND TIMES.

SO WHAT KIND OF STONE IS IT?
THERE'S GOTTA BE SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT IT, RIGHT?

YUP. THE DEMONSTONE IS ALSO CALLED THE STONE OF TRANS-FERENCE.

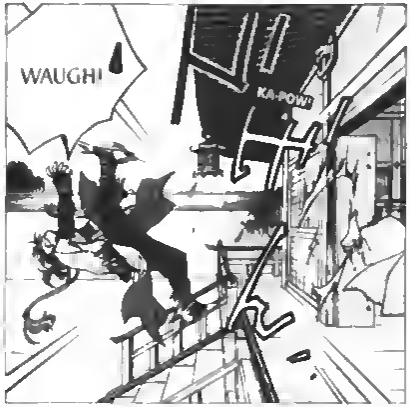
SO IS IT JUST A NORMAL ROCK TO A HUMAN?
SHADOUP!
THIS WOULD BE THE "WISDOM OF THE AGED," RIGHT?
WELL, I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU HAVEN'T BEEN WASTING YOUR TIME ALL THESE YEARS.

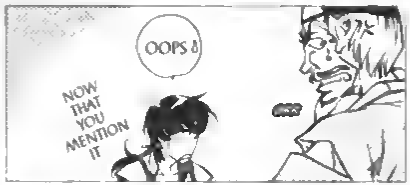

YOU'RE TELLING ME. I'VE BEEN GETTING RID OF DEMON ORBS BY SLAPPING CHARMS ON THEM, OR PUTTING THEM IN URNS AND TAKING THEM TO PRIESTS TO TAKE CARE OF.
THAT COSTS MONEY.
HUH. I GUESS THAT'S WHY IT'S CALLED THE STONE OF TRANS-FERENCE. SURE WOULD COME IN HANDY...

NO. IF THE STONE IS ATTACHED TO A WEAPON, IT WILL TRANSFER ITS DEMONIC ENERGY TO THE WEAPON ITSELF, MAKING IT POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DESTROY A DEMON ORB!

I FINALLY RETURNED HOME THE OTHER DAY...AND MY GRANDFATHER PRETTY MUCH EXPLODED.
AND ENDED UP GOING TO CHINA FOR MORE TRAINING.
UNFORTUNATELY, I FORGOT ALL ABOUT IT...

WHAT WAS THAT FOR, YOU CRAZY OLD MAN?!


WAUGH!
KA-POW!


OOPS!
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT

WHAT DID I TELL YOU? I SAID TO COME STRAIGHT HOME!
IMBECILE! NOW YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK?!

I WAS FINALLY TOLD THAT THE STONE WAS IN THE WOLF VILLAGE ON THIS MOUNTAIN.
SO ANYWAY, AFTER BEING LECTURED (AND BEATEN REPEATEDLY),

COME AGAIN?!
THERE'S A WOLF CLAN HERE?
TALK ABOUT LUCK.
SLASH
AAAA!
I'M SORRY!

I WAS ALSO TOLD TO GO GET IT, WHICH IS WHY WE'RE HERE. BUT...

BUT WE GET LOST! REALLY STUPID!

WHAT? LOOK, I DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE...
TELL YOU WHAT, SUOH. WE'LL HELP YOU FIND THE VILLAGE IF YOU'LL LET ME TALK TO THEIR LEADER.

YOU'RE NOT JUST TAKING ADVANTAGE, RIGHT?
DO YOU GUYS ALWAYS EAT THIS MUCH?
I'M STILL EATING
THIS IS LESS THAN USUAL.
TREATING

WELL, I GUESS THAT'S ALRIGHT, THEN. BY THE WAY...

RELAX. I JUST WANT TO ASK HIM SOMETHING.

IF I HAD THAT STONE, EVEN I COULD BEAT OUR LEADER!
AAH, WHO CARES?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING? IF SOMEBODY OVERHEARS...
MEANING YOU COULDN'T BEAT HIM WITHOUT IT. HMPH PATHETIC!
WHO'S THERE?!
I CAN HEAR JUST FINE. THERE'S NO NEED TO YELL.
DID YOU HEAR? A HUMAN IS COMING TO THE VILLAGE.
GENJI!!
HE'S COMING FOR THE STONE!
HMPH
SO IT'S FINALLY HAPPENING.
IT'S FOOLISH TO HAND IT OVER TO SOME HUMAN!
IT BELONGS TO US. IT SHOULD BE USED BY US!
WELL, I MEAN...
THE STONE IS A TREASURE. WHY SHOULD WE JUST LET IT GO? AARGH, WHAT IS OUR LEADER THINKING?!

DON'T GO STIRRING UP TROUBLE WITH SOME HALF-BAKED IDEA.
MA'AM! HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN THERE?
NOT LONG.
THE FATE OF THE STONE HAS ALWAYS BEEN DECIDED BY THE CLAN, GENJI.
HMPH. THAT'S SOME MOUTH YOU'VE GOT ON YOU, YOUNG LADY.
I DON'T CARE IF YOU ARE OUR LEADER'S DAUGHTER-- THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU GET TO ORDER ME AROUND.
GET YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF ME!

GRRR
SMSH
HYAA!
SASH
THWOMP
GRARGH
BWEH!
CONK

CRACK
HUH?
GRAAUGH!
SKSSSHHH

C-COME ON, GENJI! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT'S PISSING ME OFF--THAT DUMB HEAP YOU CALL A FACE.

TWO GUYS AGAINST ONE GIRL? THAT'S NOT NICE.

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!
BULL'S-EYE.
POW
POW

CRASH
PISSING ME OFF!

YOU'RE STARTING TO PISS ME OFF, HUMAN.

IS THAT SO?

GRAB
UH-HUH. YOU'RE REALLY...

HUH? YES, I'M FINE.
ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
GRIN
YOU SHOULDN'T HANG AROUND GUYS LIKE THAT, YOU KNOW.
I DON'T UNDER-STAND...
Y-YES.
OH. YEAH.
PRETTY SHARP.
THERE
THAT ARMBAND MEANS YOU'RE A KARNIN, RIGHT?
IF YOU'RE GONNA PICK A FIGHT, AT LEAST MAKE SURE YOU CAN HANDLE YOURSELF.
YOU OUGHTA THINK TWICE BEFORE SAYIN' SOMETHING . YOU'LL REGRET.
YOU KNOW.
ARE YOU SU--

WHAT?!
SUOH HERE JUST DOESN'T HAVE MUCH TACT.
CALM DOWN. HE DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING BY IT.
HEY! ARE YOU TRYING TO PICK A FIGHT WITH ME?!
EASY NOW
HUH? NO, MY NAME'S ASAGI.
Sorry
YOU MEAN YOU'RE NOT SUOH?
GRH!
THEN THAT MEANS...
SIGHE
NOW WHAT?

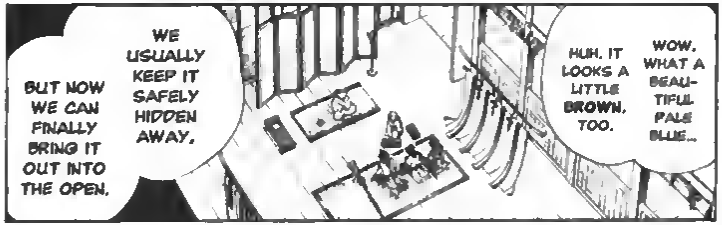
SUOH! THANK GOODNESS YOU'VE FINALLY COME.
HOW I'VE WAITED FOR THIS DAY!

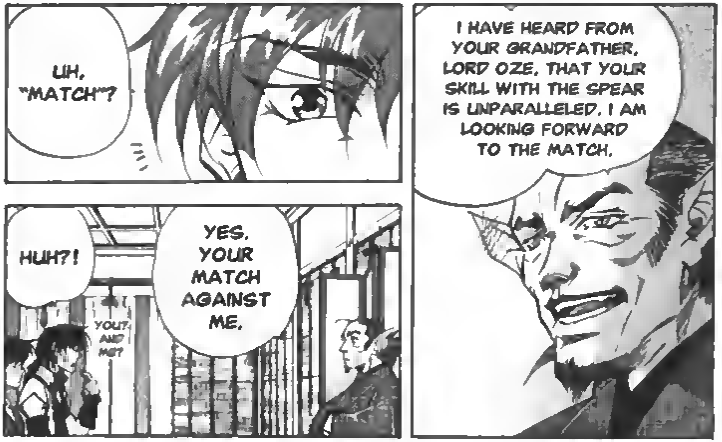
SUOH? WHAT?
I THOUGHT YOU JUST FORGOT?
THAT PREVENTED ME FROM GETTING HERE SOONER.
YEAH, SORRY ABOUT THAT. THERE WERE SOME, UH, UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES

IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME.
THIS IS MY DAUGHTER, AOI.

AH, THANK YOU.
FATHER, I'VE BROUGHT THE STONE.

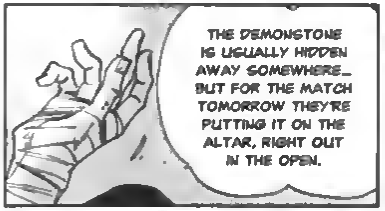
THIS IS THE DEMON-STONE.
HUH?
HEY!
HMPH

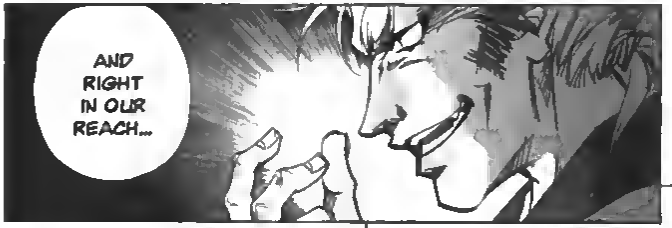

WE USUALLY KEEP IT SAFELY HIDDEN AWAY.
BUT NOW WE CAN FINALLY BRING IT OUT INTO THE OPEN.
WOW. WHAT A BEAU-TIFUL PALE BLUE...
HUH. IT LOOKS A LITTLE BROWN, TOO.

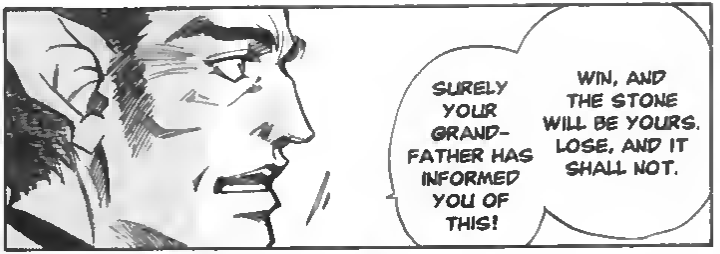

UH, "MATCH"?
I HAVE HEARD FROM YOUR GRANDFATHER, LORD OZE, THAT YOUR SKILL WITH THE SPEAR IS UNPARALLELED. I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MATCH.
HUH?!
YES. YOUR MATCH AGAINST ME.
YOU?! AND ME?

YEAH... HEY, YOU KNOW SOME-THING?
ARE YOU GOING, GENJI?

THERE'S NO WAY HE CAN BEAT THE CHIEF, THOUGH.
YEAH. AND I HEARD HE'S REALLY GOOD.
THE GUY HE'S FIGHTING IS YOUNG, RIGHT?
THIS IS GONNA BE GREAT!


THE DEMONSTONE IS USUALLY HIDDEN AWAY SOMEWHERE... BUT FOR THE MATCH TOMORROW THEY'RE PUTTING IT ON THE ALTAR, RIGHT OUT IN THE OPEN.


AND RIGHT IN OUR REACH...


WIN, AND THE STONE WILL BE YOURS. LOSE, AND IT SHALL NOT.
SURELY YOUR GRAND-FATHER HAS INFORMED YOU OF THIS!

I'M GONNA KILL THAT OLD MAN!
UH... YEAH.

HEY, IT LOOKS LIKE THE MATCH IS GONNA BE TOMORROW AFTER-NOON!

ALRIGHT! I'M DEFINITELY GOING!
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE'VE SEEN THE CHIEF PULL OUT HIS SWORD, HUH?

IT'S A CHANCE TO SEE MY FATHER IN BATTLE AGAIN.
THEY'VE ALL BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS.
WOW. A LOT OF PEOPLE SHOWED UP, HUH?

THEY SAY THAT WHEN IT COMES TO THE SWORD, NO ONE CAN EVEN COME CLOSE!

EVEN I'VE HEARD THE RUMORS ABOUT HIM.
(KUBIRAN SPEAKING)
YES. VERY.
YOUR DAD'S PRETTY GOOD, THEN?

IT'S NOT YOUR LUCKY DAY, SUOH.
HA! THAT'S GREAT!

IZUMO?
RIGHT NOW, WE'RE HEADED FOR IZUMO.

WE'RE PRACTICALLY THE SAME AGE
JUST CALL ME ASAGI, HUH?
UM, MISTER ASAGI?

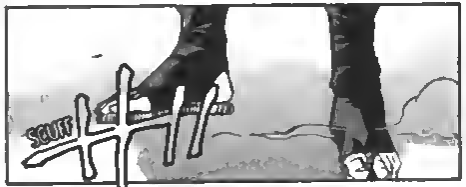
OK... WHERE ARE YOU ALL TRAVELING TO, ASAGI?

OF COURSE WE HAVE.
THAT'S WHY WE CAME HERE. WE WERE HOPING SOMEONE MIGHT HAVE HEARD OF HIM...

HE'S MY FATHER'S YOUNGER BROTHER-- MY UNCLE.

THE THING IS, WE DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS.
THAT'S RIGHT. WE'RE LOOKING FOR SEIGA. A FAMOUS MEMBER OF A WOLF CLAN LIKE THIS ONE.

UH... YEAH.
REALLY?!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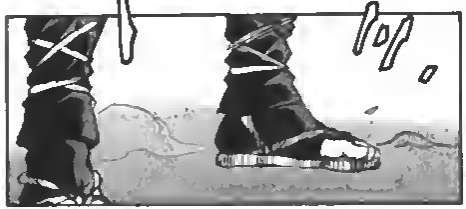


THE MATCH IS ABOUT TO START.
WHAT DO YOU SAY WE PICK THIS UP LATER?

GRIN
OH, I PLAN ON IT.
BEAT ME, AND IT'S YOURS TO TAKE.
VERY WELL.
THMP
LET US BEGIN!
krkk
KASHING
GRGH

THE STONE IS THERE, ON THE ALTAR.
BE GENTLE, HUH?
HEH.
YEAH, RIGHT.

HYAA!
SSSH
GRRR.

KLANG
KASHING
CHING
VWOOSH
CLANK

IS SUOH GONNA BE ABLE TO PULL IT OFF?
MAN, THAT WOLF GUY'S REALLY GOOD.
WHAT IS IT, AOI?
THERE'S SOMEBODY STANDING BEHIND MY FATHER... WHO IS THAT? DOESN'T HE KNOW IT'S DANGEROUS TO GET SO CLOSE?
FATHER!
GENJI? OH, NO!

DYNAMITE
DYNAMITE
thup
HEH. NOT BAD.
THANKS.

clash
HOH
THE CHIEF HAS FALLEN!
THE STONE IS MINE!
SKRAK!

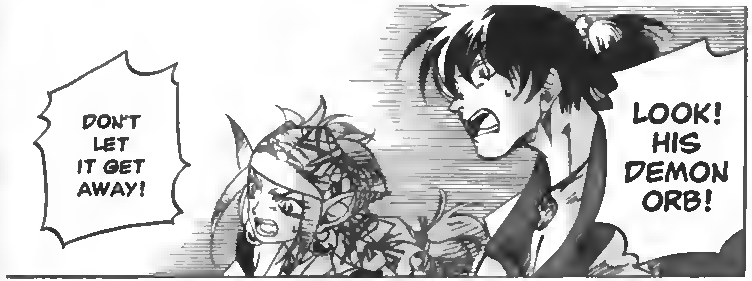
SKLRSH

STOP IT!
IT'S ONE DIRTY MOVE AFTER ANOTHER WITH YOU, ISN'T IT?
Jaaj!
GENJI, YOU SON OF A...
SHUT UP AND MOVE!
GRARGH!
SCRAK
SUOH! GET THE STONE!
TAK

YOU'RE DEAD!
BWSH
DROP YOUR SPEAR AND BACK AWAY FROM THE STONE! NOW!
DASH
OUT OF THE WAY!
THUD
AIEE!

SWOOP
WAUGH!
VOORR
WHAT THE?!
A-HA!
KA-CHK

dash
SHMP!
ON MY SPEAR? HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO DO THAT?!
SUOH!
DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY! QUICK, PUT THE STONE ON YOUR SPEAR!
GLARE
YOU'RE NOT GOIN' ANYWHERE!


DON'T LET IT GET AWAY!
LOOK! HIS DEMON ORB!

DON'T MIND IF I DO.

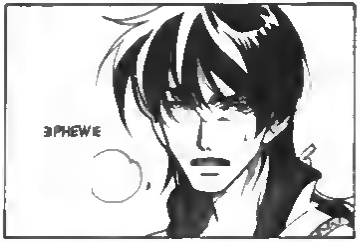
USE THE STONE, SUOH!

THWACK

GRIN

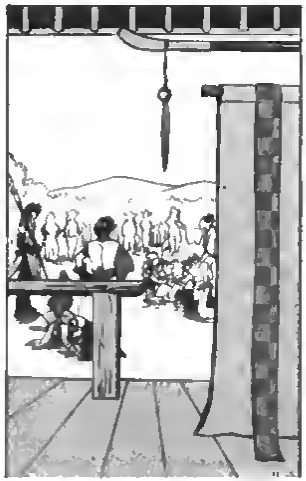
NO...

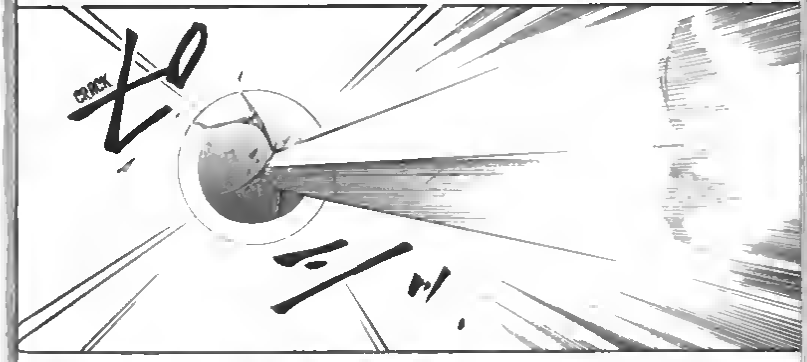
WHAM


PHEW

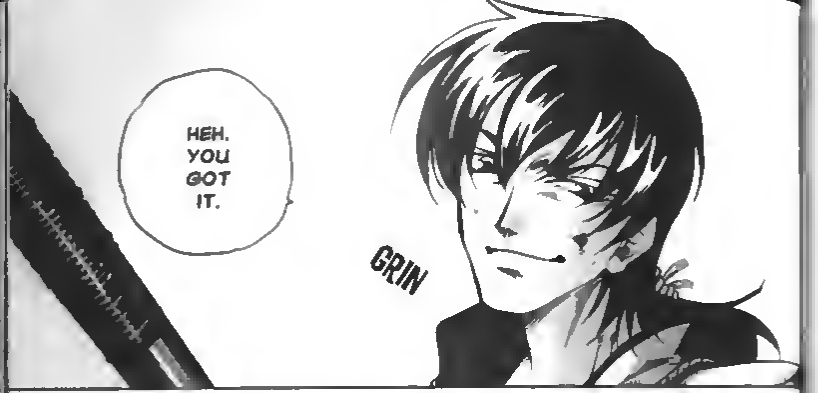
IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN THIS TO GET THE BETTER OF ME
FATHER! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?

SHSH



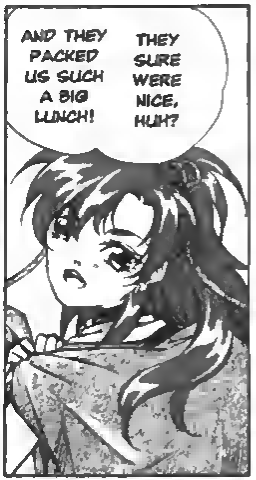

DRAW

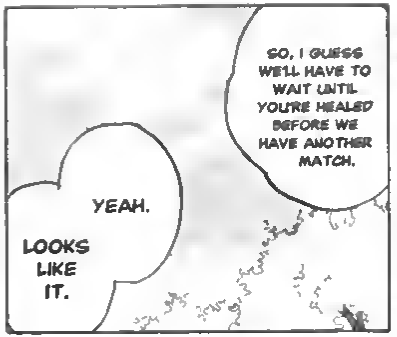
GWSSHH

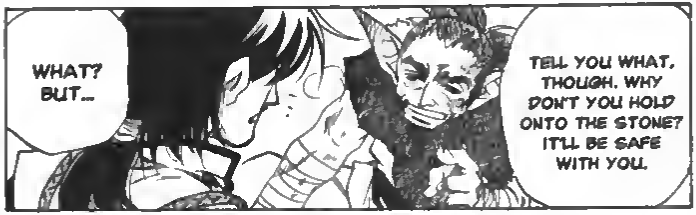

HEH. YOU GOT IT.
GRIN

ANYONE WHO FEEDS US IS NICE.
YOU CAN'T GO DECIDING WHETHER SOMEONE'S "NICE" OR NOT BASED ON HOW MUCH FOOD THEY GIVE YOU!
JEEZ!

BY THE WAY, WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING US...
CUT IT OUT.


AND THEY PACKED US SUCH A BIG LUNCH!
THEY SURE WERE NICE, HUH?


SO, I GUESS WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE HEALED BEFORE WE HAVE ANOTHER MATCH.
YEAH. LOOKS LIKE IT.


WHAT? BUT...
TELL YOU WHAT, THOUGH. WHY DON'T YOU HOLD ONTO THE STONE? IT'LL BE SAFE WITH YOU.

I LIKE YOU, SUOH. WHAT DO YOU SAY NEXT TIME, WE GET TOGETHER FOR A DRINK FIRST?

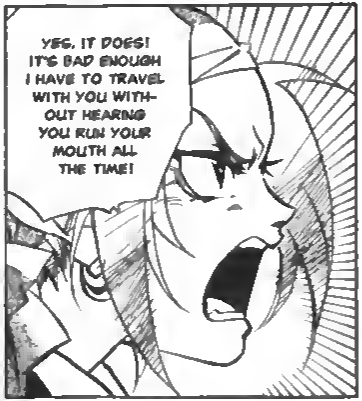
YUP! JUST LEAVE EVERY-THING TO ME!
YEAH, BUT... ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OK WITH THIS?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I'M GOING WITH YOU TO IZUMO.
AS THANKS FOR YOUR HELP, MY FATHER WANTS ME TO TAKE YOU DIRECTLY TO SAIGA.
IF I'M THERE, THINGS'LL GO SMOOTHER, TOO.

HEY, YOU OVER THERE
EXCUSE ME?! I HAVE A NAME, Y'KNOW!
EEP! SHE'S ASKING FOR IT--!

WHY DON'T YOU BUTT OUT?! IT'S GOT NOTHIN' TO DO WITH YOU!
GRARR
THAT SHOULD BE PLENTY.
WHATEVER. WHY DON'T YOU STOP HARPING ON ASAGI AND THEM ABOUT MONEY? YOU HAVE THE STONE, ALRIGHT?

OH, SURE! AND I'M JUST DYIN' TO HAVE YOU AROUND, YOU MANGY OLD MUTT!
WHAT'D YOU SAY?!


YES, IT DOES! IT'S BAD ENOUGH I HAVE TO TRAVEL WITH YOU WITH-OUT HEARING YOU RUN YOUR MOUTH ALL THE TIME!

THAT'S WHY I ATE SO MUCH!
HEY, WE THOUGHT IT WAS ON YOU!
YOU GUYS ATE LIKE PIGS ON MY COIN!
I'M NOT LEAVIN' UNTIL I GET WHAT I'M OWED. REMEMBER LUNCH?
WHEN DID I EVER SAY THAT IT WAS "ON ME"?!
THEY DID. YES

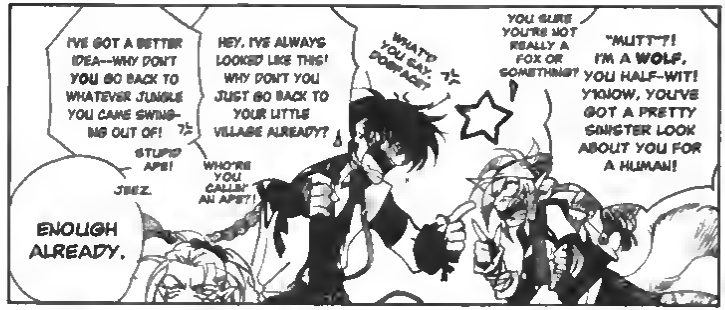
HE IS CHEAP-SKATE, YES?
WELL GUESS WHAT-- UNTIL I GET MY MONEY BACK, I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE.

CUT THAT OUT!
SUOH?
AND YOUR... MISSY.

HUH?
I SAY NOTHING!
SQUEEZE
WHAT'D YOU SAY?!

AOI?!
(ASAGI SPEAKING)

CHAPTER 3:
KUKO


I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA--WHY DON'T YOU GO BACK TO WHATEVER JUNGLE YOU CAME SWING-ING OUT OF!
STUPID APE!
JEEZ.
HEY, I'VE ALWAYS LOOKED LIKE THIS! WHY DON'T YOU JUST GO BACK TO YOUR LITTLE VILLAGE ALREADY?
WHO'RE YOU CALLIN' AN APE?!
WHAT'D YOU SAY, DOGFACE?
YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT REALLY A FOX OR SOMETHING?
"MUTT"?! I'M A WOLF, YOU HALF-WIT! Y'KNOW, YOU'VE GOT A PRETTY SINISTER LOOK ABOUT YOU FOR A HUMAN!
ENOUGH ALREADY.

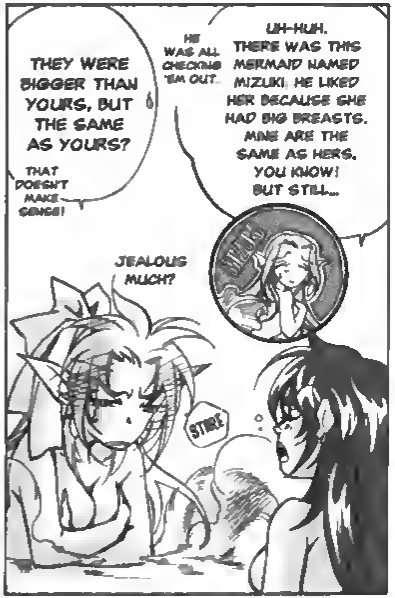
YOU JUST TRY IT!
I'M ABOUT TO PUT WOLF ON THE MENU, GIRL!!
UH, LET'S TRY WAITING A LITTLE LONGER, KAEDE
WHAT?! SHE JUST HAD BREAKFAST!
HEY, CAN WE EAT LUNCH NOW?
YOU NEVER LEARN, DO YOU?!

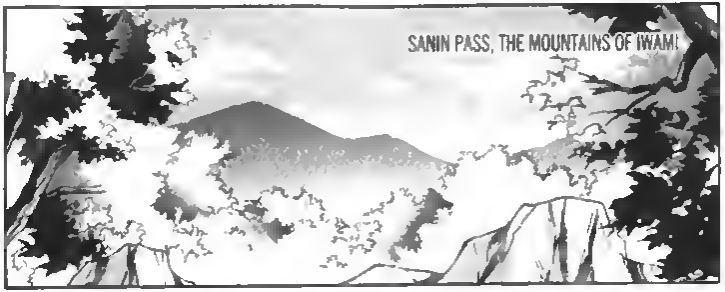
UH...WELL, THEY'RE NOT SMALL.
But they're not that big, either
BAH!

WOULD YOU SAY YOUR BREASTS ARE BIG?
WH-WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!

WHAT?! R-REALLY?
ASAGI LIKES BIG BREASTS.

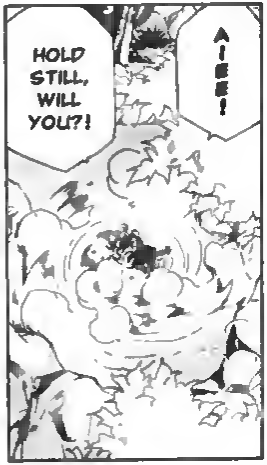
YOU TRYIN' TO START A FIGHT?
UH, SORRY TO BREAK IT TO YOU, BUT MINE ARE A LITTLE BIGGER.
MINE ARE THE SAME AS YOURS, TOO!
I'M TELLING YOU, BREASTS ARE BREASTS!
THEY'RE ALL THE SAME!


THEY WERE BIGGER THAN YOURS, BUT THE SAME AS YOURS?
THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!
HE WAS ALL CHECKING 'EM OUT.
UH-HUH. THERE WAS THIS MERMAID NAMED MIZUKI. HE LIKED HER BECAUSE SHE HAD BIG BREASTS. MINE ARE THE SAME AS HERS. YOU KNOW! BUT STILL...
JEALOUS MUCH?
STRIKE


SANIN PASS, THE MOUNTAINS OF IWAMI

SPLSSH
BLEH.
I MEAN, YOU ARE A GIRL.
YOU HAVE TO BATHE YOURSELF, KAEDE!

stare

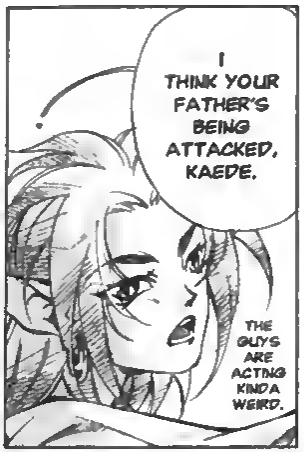

HOLD STILL, WILL YOU?!
AIEE!

EEEK!
SQUEEZ!

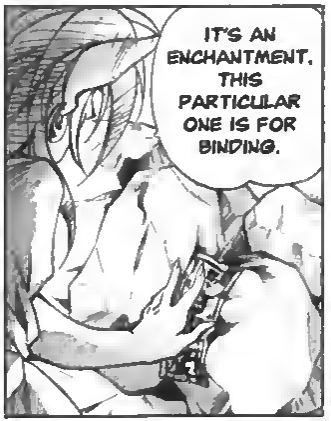
OH. SO MOM'S WOULD BE ICE, RIGHT?
(KAORI SPEAKING)
MINE IS THE FLAME SIGIL.
RIGHT. AND YOUR GRANDPA HAS THE THUNDER SIGIL.
ENOUGH ALREADY! I DON'T LIKE GUYS CHECKIN' ME OUT LIKE THAT!
YOU'VE GOT IT ON YOUR BACK, TOO. RIGHT?
HUH. SO THE BIGGER AND MORE COMPLICATED YOUR SIGIL IS, THE STRONGER YOU ARE.
SHUT UP!
C'MON, SHOW US A LITTLE MORE!
I WANT A SIGIL, TOO!
DO YOU HAVE IT ON, LIKE, THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET, TOO?
QUIT PAWIN' AT ME ALREADY!
OH, COME ON, WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

I'D SAY THEIR BOOBS ARE THE LEAST OF THEIR PROBLEMS.
Anyway you seen one you seen 'em all
IT'S EMBARRASSING
I WISH THEY'D STOP GOIN' ON ABOUT THEIR BOOBS.
I'M JEALOUS.
WELL, AREN'T YOU THE LADIES' MAN!
WHAT'S THAT?
IT'S NOT A TATTOO. IT'S A SIGIL.
HEY KURENAI, DOES THAT TATTOO COVER YOUR WHOLE BODY?
WELL, I GUESS IT'S KIND OF LIKE A TATTOO. AS YOUR DEMONIC POWERS INCREASE, YOU GET TO ETCH MORE OF THE PATTERN ONTO YOUR BODY.
GETTING IT CAN DOUBLE YOUR STRENGTH BUT THE PATTERN ITSELF DEPENDS ON YOUR KIND OF POWER,
AND YOU ONLY GET TO CHOOSE ONE DESIGN.
DOES IT DO ANYTHING?

KAEDE?


I THINK YOUR FATHER'S BEING ATTACKED, KAEDE.
THE GUYS ARE ACTING KINDA WEIRD.

SPLISH
SPLISH
YOU ALRIGHT?
Did you find something?

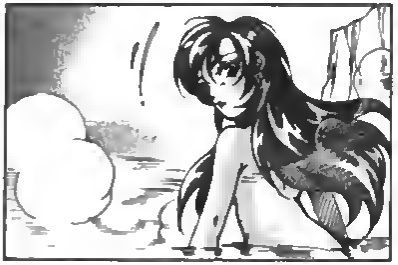

IT'S AN ENCHANTMENT. THIS PARTICULAR ONE IS FOR BINDING.

SEE THAT ROCK? THERE'S SOMETHING ON IT.

I GUESS THIS MEANS THERE'S SOMETHING IN THERE.

KAEDE...

OK.
COME ON. IT'S TIME TO GET DRESSED.
WE SHOULD SHOW THIS TO THE OTHERS.
FWP
SPLISH

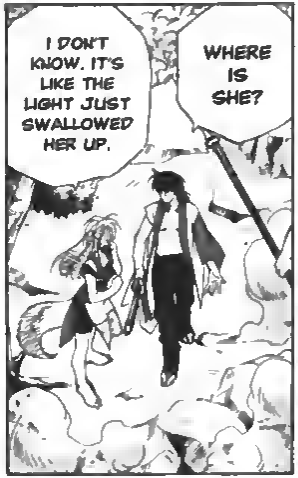


?
?!

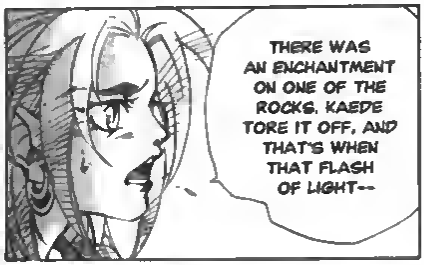
drip
RELEASE ME...
KAEDE. THE SEAL.
Huh?
KAEDE?!
NO! DON'T TOUCH THAT!

skrrk
hsssss
GRAUGH!
WH- WHAT WAS THAT?!

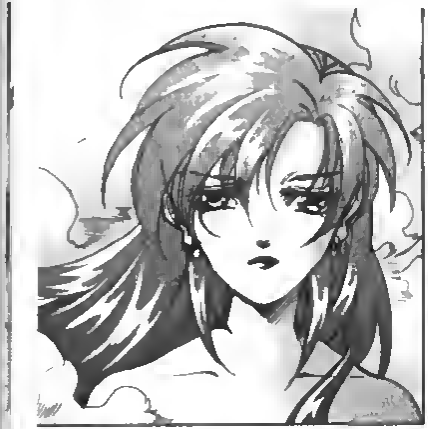
AOI!


I DON'T KNOW. IT'S LIKE THE LIGHT JUST SWALLOWED HER UP.
WHERE IS SHE?

I-I DON'T KNOW.
WHAT HAPPENED?! WHAT WAS THAT LIGHT?


THERE WAS AN ENCHANTMENT ON ONE OF THE ROCKS. KAEDE TORE IT OFF, AND THAT'S WHEN THAT FLASH OF LIGHT--

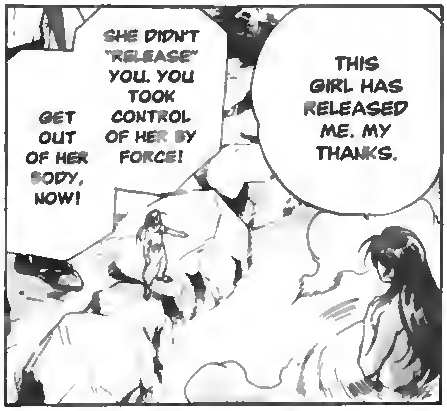
ASAGI! OVER THERE!

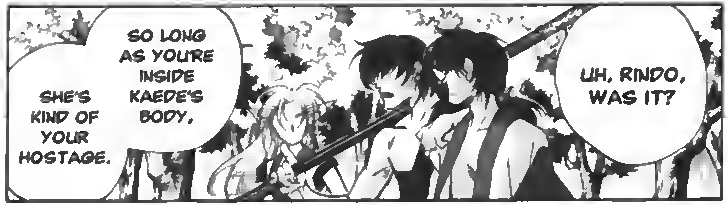

KAEDE?

I GUESS LOOKS LIKE HER!
HUH? BUT...
THAT'S NOT KAEDE.
WILL YOU IDIOTS CUT IT OUT? WE HAVE A BIGGER PROBLEM HERE.

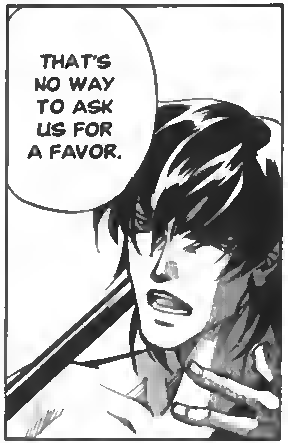
HEY! WHY DO YOU GET TO LOOK?
It's not like looking's gonna do any harm
SUOH! QUIT GAWKIN' ALREADY!
TURN YOUR HEAD
SLAP

I REALIZE THE TROUBLE I AM CAUSING, BUT I NEED YOUR HELP.

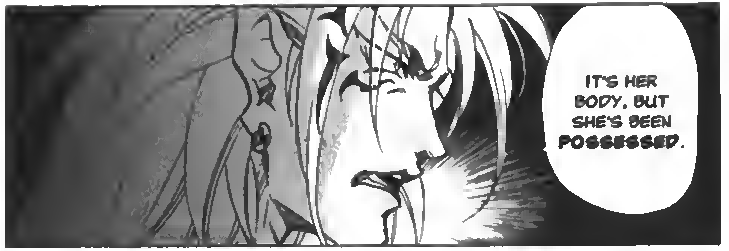

THIS GIRL HAS RELEASED ME. MY THANKS.
SHE DIDN'T "RELEASE" YOU. YOU TOOK CONTROL OF HER BY FORCE!
GET OUT OF HER BODY, NOW!


UH, RINDO, WAS IT?
SO LONG AS YOU'RE INSIDE KAEDE'S BODY,
SHE'S KIND OF YOUR HOSTAGE.

I'M SORRY. BUT I CANNOT LEAVE THIS BODY JUST YET.
WHAT?!

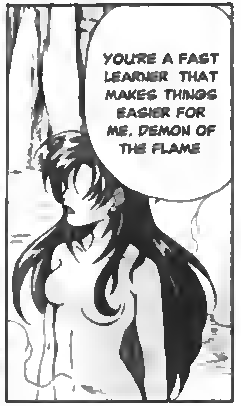

THAT'S NO WAY TO ASK US FOR A FAVOR.

YOU LOUSY SON OF A—
HMPH
ALRIGHT.

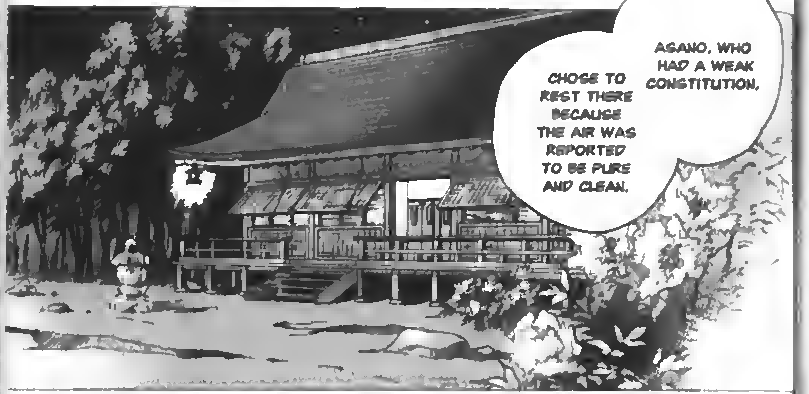

IT'S HER BODY, BUT SHE'S BEEN POSSESSED.

I AM A KUKO, A FOX SPIRIT.

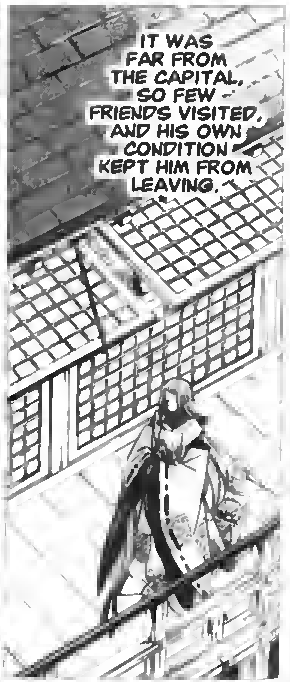
WHO ARE YOU?


YOU'RE A FAST LEARNER THAT MAKES THINGS EASIER FOR ME, DEMON OF THE FLAME

MY NAME IS RINDO.


ASANO, WHO HAD A WEAK CONSTITUTION,
CHOSE TO REST THERE BECAUSE THE AIR WAS REPORTED TO BE PURE AND CLEAN.

HE LED A LONELY LIFE,

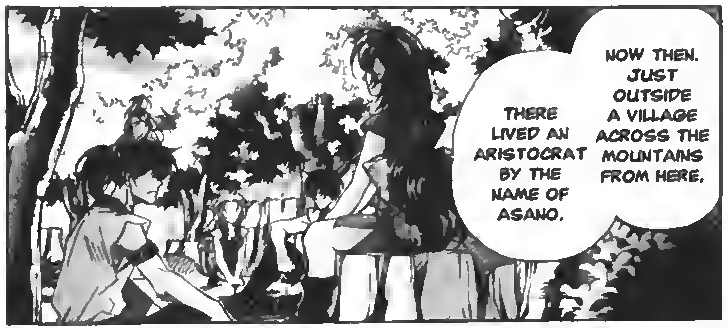

IT WAS FAR FROM THE CAPITAL, SO FEW FRIENDS VISITED, AND HIS OWN CONDITION KEPT HIM FROM LEAVING.

THEN WE'LL GIVE YOU AN ANSWER.
URGH
URGH
URGH
YOU SOUND LIKE YOU HAVE YOUR REASONS FOR DOING THIS. LET'S HEAR 'EM.

YEAH, WHAT HARM COULD IT DO?
GET HIT?
HE'S RIGHT. IF WE LISTEN TO HIS STORY, WE MIGHT FIND A WAY TO GET HIM OUT OF KAEDE.

I HEAR THAT KUKO ARE PRETTY HONEST. HE PROBABLY WON'T TRY ANYTHING FUNNY.
CALM DOWN.
ASAG!
PWAH

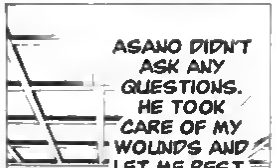
FINE!


THERE LIVED AN ARISTOCRAT BY THE NAME OF ASANO.
NOW THEN. JUST OUTSIDE A VILLAGE ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS FROM HERE,

IF SOMEONE IS AFTER YOU, YOU CAN HIDE INSIDE MY HOUSE

PLEASE, THINK NOTHING OF IT!
I DON'T WISH TO BE A BURDEN. A MOMENT'S REST AND I'LL BE ON MY WAY.

SO WHAT SHALL I CALL YOU?


ASANO DIDN'T ASK ANY QUESTIONS. HE TOOK CARE OF MY WOUNDS AND LET ME REST.

THAT'S A NICE NAME I AM ASANO.
MY NAME IS RINDO

YOU THERE ARE YOU ALRIGHT?!

THAT WAS WHEN I MET HIM.
HNGH

I WAS BADLY HURT
I WAS ATTACKED BY A BANDIT
WHAT HAPPENED? THESE WOUNDS ARE TERRIBLE

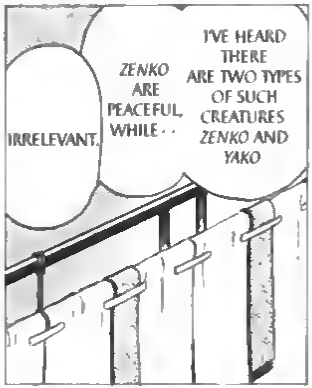
WAIT.
SOMEONE! THIS PERSON IS WOUNDED! HE NEEDS HELP, NOW!

MAY I REST HERE JUST FOR A LITTLE WHILE?

I LIVE ALONE, SO YOU NEED NOT WORRY PLEASE, JUST TEND TO YOUR WOUNDS.
AND IF YOU DON'T MIND, I WOULD ENJOY YOUR COMPANY EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.
THAT'S VERY KIND.
WE TALKED ABOUT MANY THINGS, AND GREW TO RESPECT EACH OTHER.
BY THE TIME MY WOUNDS HEALED...
ASANO AND I HAD A LOT IN COMMON.

WE HAD BECOME THE BEST OF FRIENDS.
STILL, I SHOULDN'T HAVE STAYED.
LORD ASANO.
A KARININ?!
A MAN WHO CLAIMS TO BE A KARININ WISHES TO SEE YOU

INDEED I HAVE CHASED A PARTICULAR FOX ALL THE WAY FROM NANKAI ROAD
ARE YOU IN SEARCH OF PREY?
I HEAR THAT YOU ARE A KARININ

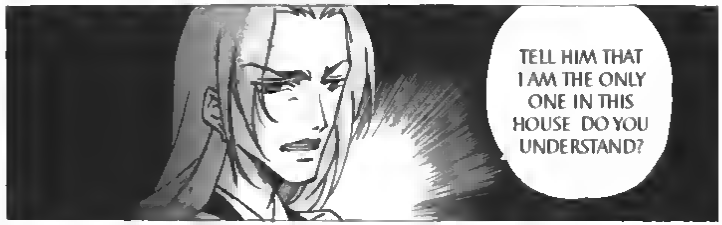

IRRELEVANT.
ZENKO ARE PEACEFUL, WHILE...
I'VE HEARD THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF SUCH CREATURES ZENKO AND YAKO

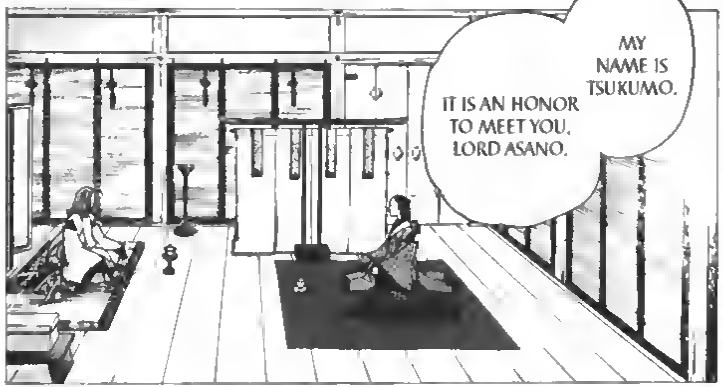
IT IS A CUNNING BEAST THAT HAS DISGUISED ITSELF AS A MAN

YOU DON'T SAY

ALL DEMONS DESERVE DEATH

YES, BUT..
VERY WELL. I SHALL MEET WITH HIM BUT DO NOT MENTION RINDO


TELL HIM THAT I AM THE ONLY ONE IN THIS HOUSE DO YOU UNDERSTAND?


MY NAME IS TSUKUMO.
IT IS AN HONOR TO MEET YOU, LORD ASANO.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT
HA HA! DON'T TELL ME THAT YOU WOULD SIDE WITH DEMONS LORD ASANO
THAT'S A RATHER HARSH WAY OF THINKING.
BY THE WAY, HAVE YOU SEEN THE FOX I'M AFTER?
NO. I HAVEN'T SEEN ANYONE LIKE THAT
HE SHOULD BE SEVERELY WOUNDED.
—

THAT WOULD BE APPRECIATED
WE ARE FAR FROM THE VILLAGE, AND I AM THE ONLY PERSON TO BE FOUND FOR MILES
IF I HEAR ANYTHING, I WILL LET YOU KNOW
WE WILL MEET AGAIN AGAIN
GRIN
YOU MAY REACH ME AT THE RANGER'S OFFICE IN THE VILLAGE
SEARCHING THIS AREA WILL TAKE SOME TIME

I THINK HE HAD AN IDEA. THAT'S WHY HE HID ME FROM TSUKUMO.
DID THIS ASANO GUY KNOW WHAT YOU REALLY ARE?
I SHOULDN'T HAVE LET HIM GET INVOLVED IN THIS.
IT CAME FROM OVER THERE!
A SCREAM?
AUGH!
I SENSE SOMETHING...

IS THERE A BOUNTY ON YOU?
NO... BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER TO TSUKUMO.
HE ISN'T AFTER THE MONEY. HE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT GOOD OR EVIL.
HE SIMPLY WANTS TO KILL.
BOUNTY OR NOT, HE CAN SLAUGHTER AS MANY DEMONS AS HE WANTS WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT ANY CONSEQUENCES.
HE HAS KILLED MANY FRIENDS OF MINE--THE WEAKER ONES.
I'M SURE OTHERS HAVE MET SIMILAR FATES.

COME OUT!
NOOOOO!
BUSH
EEK!
SO YOU'RE IN THERE, EH?
TURTLE
N-NO!
IT'S RINDO, ISN'T IT? LET'S GO AFTER HIM!
KAEDE, WAIT!
DON'T DO THAT, YOU IDIOT!
WHERE ARE YOU, FOX? SHOW YOURSELF!
I KNOW YOU'RE HERE. I CAN SMELL YOU!
HE WASN'T INSIDE THIS GUY.
STOP, TSUKUMO!

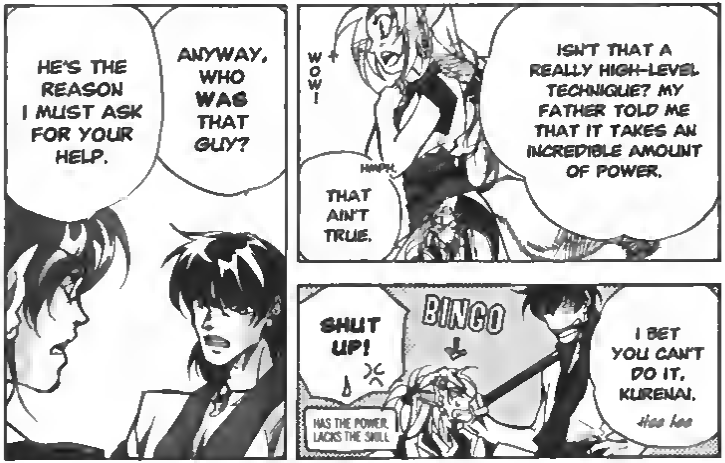
SMASH
HYAA!
NO. THAT'S WHERE YOU ARE.
I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.
RINOO!
SMASH
BUT YOU JUST SAID IT'S TSUKUMO! Didn't you?
WHY NOT? THAT'S TSUKUMO, RIGHT?
WAIT! DON'T HURT HIM!
YES, BUT IT'S ASANO, TOO!

SNICKER
THAT'S FUNNY.
I PROMISE I'LL BE BACK. WAIT HERE.
HUH?
MY BODY'S TURNING INVISIBLE.
RUNNING AWAY AGAIN?
YOU CAN'T STAND TO LEAVE HIM THIS WAY.
OF COURSE YOU'LL RETURN, RINDO.

AND THIS IS THE RESULT!
I TOLD YOU. I GOT ASANO INVOLVED...
LEAVE? WHAT DO... HEY, SOMETHING FEELS WARM.
SHIMMER
LOOK!
OH!
DASH!
AAAUGH!
WOOSH
I'M SORRY, BUT I NEED YOU TO LEAVE RIGHT NOW.

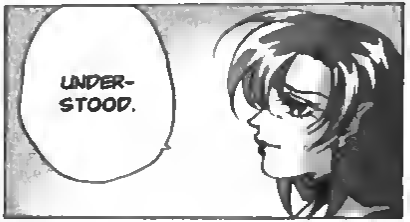
WE'RE BACK WHERE WE WERE BEFORE. SEE, THERE'S THE HOT SPRING.
WHA...
WHAT'S GOING ON? WHERE ARE WE?!
CALM DOWN.
FWP
FWP
CHK
RUMBLE

YES.
THAT THING YOU JUST DID...WAS THAT A TIME SHIFT?


HE'S THE REASON I MUST ASK FOR YOUR HELP.
ANYWAY, WHO WAS THAT GUY?
WOW!
HMPH.
THAT AIN'T TRUE.
ISN'T THAT A REALLY HIGH-LEVEL TECHNIQUE? MY FATHER TOLD ME THAT IT TAKES AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF POWER.
SHUT UP!
BINGO
HAS THE POWER, LACKS THE SKILL
I BET YOU CAN'T DO IT, KURENAI.
Hee hee

NAME IT.
WE HAVE ONE CONDITION.
LEMME GO!!
HMPH.
SEEMS LIKE YOU DRAGGED US BACK HERE TO EXPLAIN, BUT WE'RE NOT GONNA HELP YOU, NO MATTER...
SQUEEZE
GAURGH!

BUT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO KAEDE...
WE'LL COOPERATE AS LONG AS YOU PROMISE TO GIVE BACK THAT GIRL YOU'VE POSSESSED, UNHARMED.


UNDER-STOOD.

YOU'RE IN FOR A WORLD OF TROUBLE.

THAT DAY...
ASANO DECIDED NOT TO TELL ME ABOUT TSUKUMO'S VISIT.
BUT I HAPPENED TO SEE TSUKUMO LEAVING THE HOUSE.
I KNEW I COULDN'T KEEP MY SECRET ANY LONGER, SO I TOLD ASANO EVERYTHING.
I SEE
SO YOU REALLY ARE THE FOX HE'S LOOKING FOR.
NOW THAT TSUKUMO IS HERE, THERE IS NO WAY I CAN STAY.
I'M SORRY I INTENDED TO LEAVE AS SOON AS I WAS HEALED
BUT IT WAS TOO DIFFICULT TO BID YOU FAREWELL

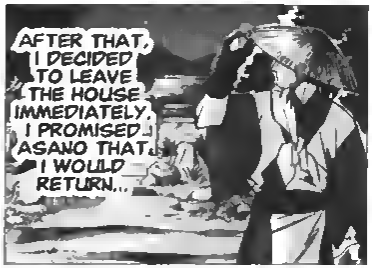
YOU GET THEIR BODIES AFTER THEY DIE
I USE MY POWERS TO GIVE THEM ONE MORE YEAR AND IN EXCHANGE
CORRECT
HOW LONG HAVE YOU POSSESSED THIS MAN'S BODY?
IT'S A LITTLE DIFFERENT THAN POSSESSION WHEN HUMANS ARE ON THE BRINK OF DEATH THEY OFTEN WISH FOR MORE TIME
YES
CAN YOU TELL IE SOMEONE IS GOING TO DIE SOON?
THAT'S WHY I COULDN'T LEAVE YOU!
SINCE I HAVE BEEN WITH YOU I'VE EXPERIENCED A SENSE OF PEACE I'VE NEVER KNOWN BEFORE
NO! OF COURSE NOT, ASANO.
IS THAT WHY YOU CAME TO ME?

I CAN'T EVEN EXPRESS HOW HAPPY YOU'VE MADE ME

BUT THEN YOU CAME ALONG AND GAVE ME THE BEST TIMES OF MY LIEE

ASANO...

EXCUSE ME, LORD ASANO
WHERE IS YOUR ERIEND THE FOX?

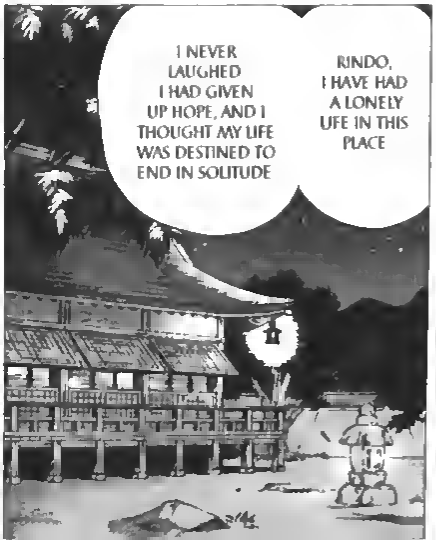

AFTER THAT, I DECIDED TO LEAVE THE HOUSE IMMEDIATELY. I PROMISED ASANO THAT I WOULD RETURN...

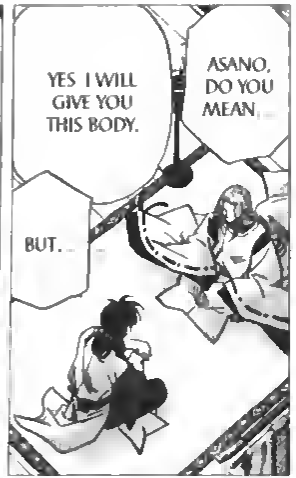
NO THANKS
I'LL GET MY MASTER.
ONE MOMENT
BUT I SHOULD NOT HAVE LEFT.

WILL YOU GIVE ME ONE MORE YEAR?

I DON'T HAVE MUCH LONGER TO LIVE, DO I?
THEN I ASK YOU FOR THE TRUTH ONCE MORE

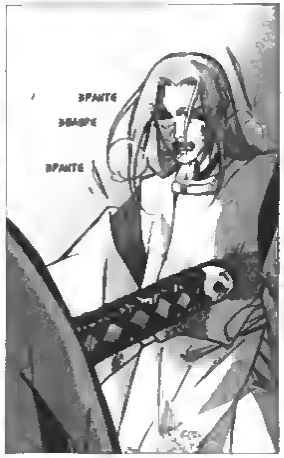
THAT IS WHY I WANTED TO ASK YOU
DON'T LOOK SO TROUBLED IT'S MY BODY. I'M WELL AWARE OF MY CONDITION.


I NEVER LAUGHED I HAD GIVEN UP HOPE, AND I THOUGHT MY LIFE WAS DESTINED TO END IN SOLITUDE
RINDO, I HAVE HAD A LONELY LIFE IN THIS PLACE

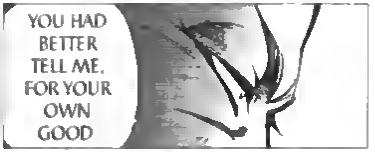

YES I WILL GIVE YOU THIS BODY.
ASANO, DO YOU MEAN...
BUT...

SKLRSSH

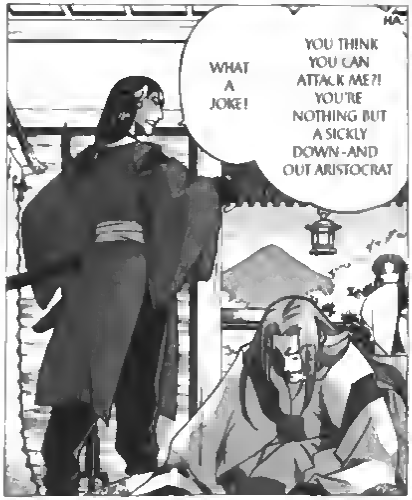
HOW COULD THIS BE?


SPAITE
SPAITE
SPAITE

HA!
KHOOSH
BY THE LIKES OF YOU!


YOU HAD BETTER TELL ME, FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

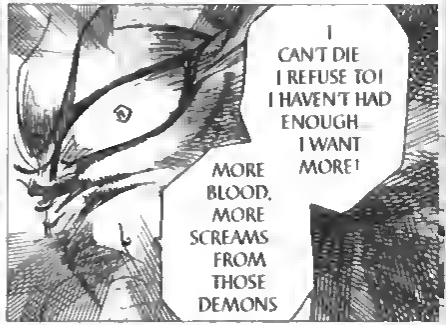
I CAN'T ALLOW RINDO TO BE KILLED.


HA
WHAT A JOKE!
YOU THINK YOU CAN ATTACK ME?! YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A SICKLY DOWN-AND OUT ARISTOCRAT

WHAM!

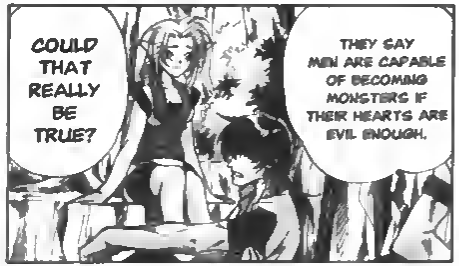
BY THE TIME I CAME BACK TO THE HOUSE...
ASANO WAS NO LONGER HIMSELF.

SHI RP
GRGHH


I CAN'T DIE I REFUSE TO! I HAVEN'T HAD ENOUGH... I WANT MORE!
MORE BLOOD, MORE SCREAMS FROM THOSE DEMONS

TSUKUMO'S EVIL ESSENCE TRANSFORMED HIM INTO SOMETHING INHUMAN.

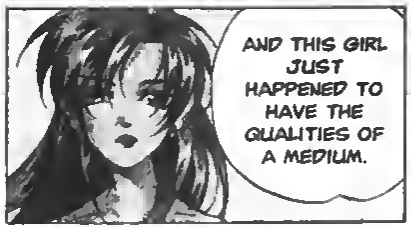
A HUMAN POSSESSED BY ANOTHER HUMAN?! HOW'S THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?


COULD THAT REALLY BE TRUE?
THEY SAY MEN ARE CAPABLE OF BECOMING MONSTERS IF THEIR HEARTS ARE EVIL ENOUGH.

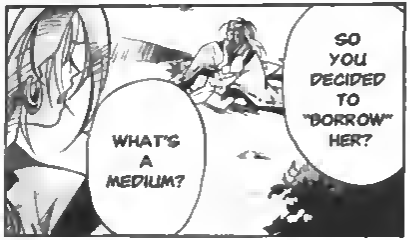
HAVING NO CHOICE, I SEALED MY AURA IN THAT ROCK FORMATION.

I WAS ATTACKED BY BANDITS AND LOST MY BODY.
I COULDN'T BEAR TO HARM ASANO, SO I ESCAPED. BUT WHEN I GOT HERE,

BUT I COULDN'T FREE MYSELF OF THIS SPELL.
YES. I SUPPRESSED MY PRESENCE TO HIDE FROM TSUKUMO.
SO YOU DID THAT BY YOURSELF?
That shows?


AND THIS GIRL JUST HAPPENED TO HAVE THE QUALITIES OF A MEDIUM.

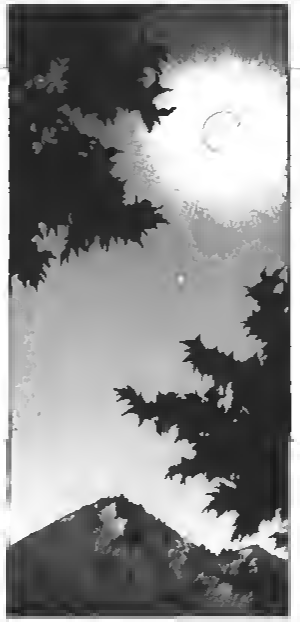
THAT'S WHEN YOU APPEARED.


WHAT'S A MEDIUM?
SO YOU DECIDED TO "BORROW" HER?

BUT HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THIS TSUKUMO GUY TO LEAVE ASANO'S BODY?

THAT DEPENDS ON YOU, AND YOUR POWER.

KAEDE IS EASILY POSSESSED. HER MOTHER WAS A SHRINE MAIDEN, SO I GUESS THAT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.



OUR POWER?

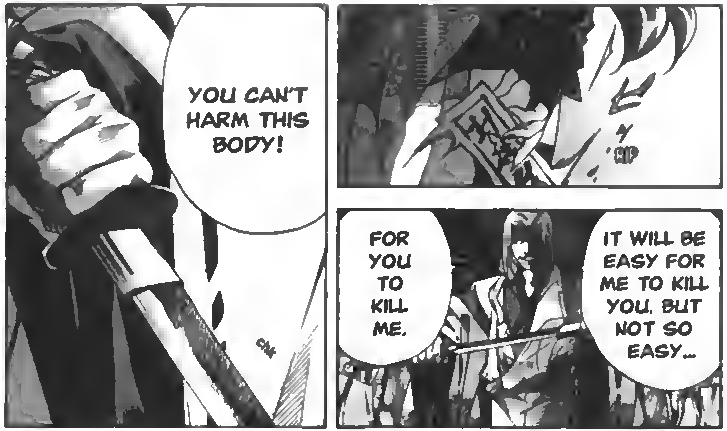
YOU'LL HAVE TO KILL ME FIRST.

HA!
YOU CAME BACK. WHAT A STUPID, LOYAL FOX YOU ARE.

I'M TAKING ASANO BACK.

STOP!!
SLASH
WE ONLY HAVE ONE CHANCE -- PLACE AN ENCHANTMENT OF IMMOBILIZATION ON HIM, THEN...
GRRGH!
BSHRK

YES IF WE DO THAT, WE CAN GET TSUKUMO OUT OF ASANO'S BODY
WHAT?! YOU WANT ME TO STAB IT?


YOU CAN'T HARM THIS BODY!
CHK
FOR YOU TO KILL ME.
IT WILL BE EASY FOR ME TO KILL YOU. BUT NOT SO EASY...

!!

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, RINDO?!
DASH

SUOH! HE'S OUT! SUOH!

ZWORR!
GRGH!

GRRRR!

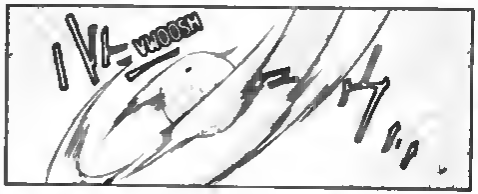
CUT THROUGH BOTH THE CHARM AND TSUKUMO
YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO
MOST WEAPONS CANNOT CUT MY CHARMS, BUT THAT SWORD OF YOURS HAS EXTRAORDINARY POWERS

KILL TSUKUMO!

PLEASE, ASAGI.
HE'LL BE FINE THE CHARM WILL ABSORB THE DAMAGE
BUT WHAT ABOUT ASANO?!

VWOOSH
YAAAH!!

SKRAK


WHOOSH

HYAA!

BWOOSH

YES.
SO I PRESS THIS STONE AGAINST YOUR FOREHEAD?

silence
し――――ん
!

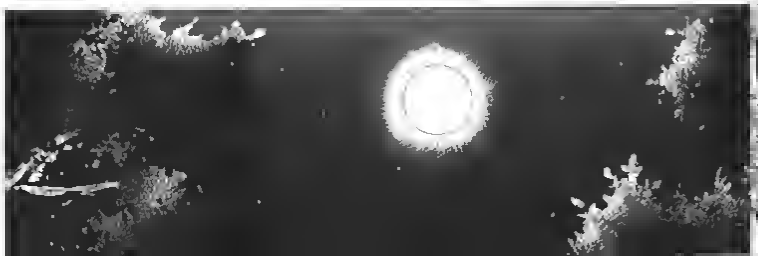
HERE GOES.

SHIMMER
AAAA!
WAUGH!

ぼー

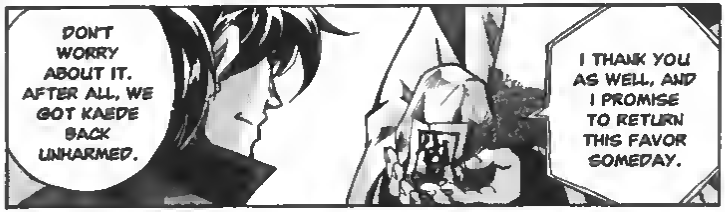
ZZZ

HOW IS HE?
HARD TO TELL.



THANKS. WE'LL DO THAT.
PLEASE COME VISIT ME WHEN YOUR TASKS ARE COMPLETE.

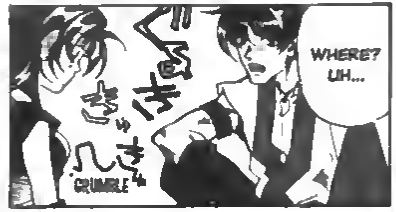
I AM IN YOUR DEBT.


DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. AFTER ALL, WE GOT KAEDE BACK UNHARMED.
I THANK YOU AS WELL, AND I PROMISE TO RETURN THIS FAVOR SOMEDAY.

HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY.
THANKS. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES, TOO.

WHAT'RE YOU SAYING THAT FOR? IF HE WANTS TO RETURN THE FAVOR, LET HIM DO IT.
BUT HE'LL BE STUCK IN THAT STONE FOR A WHILE.

YOU REALLY DON'T REMEMBER A THING, DO YOU?
HMM.
SPOOKY.
THE STONE'S TALKING!

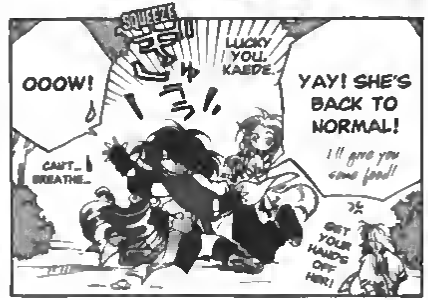

WHERE? UH...
GRUMBLE

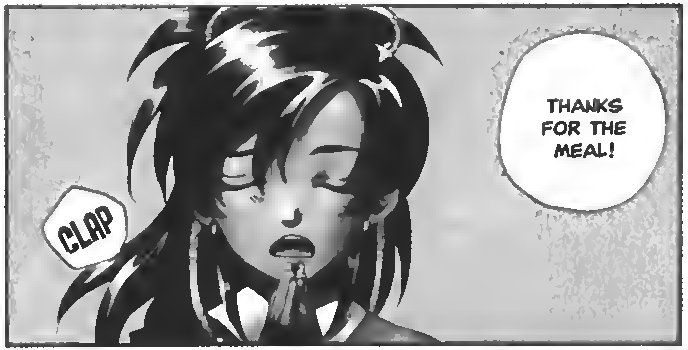
ASAGI? WHERE ARE WE?
KAEDE? DO YOU RECOGNIZE ME?

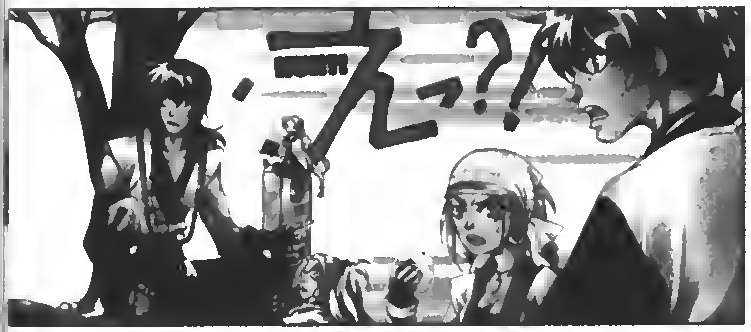
I'M HUNGRY.
When are we gonna eat?

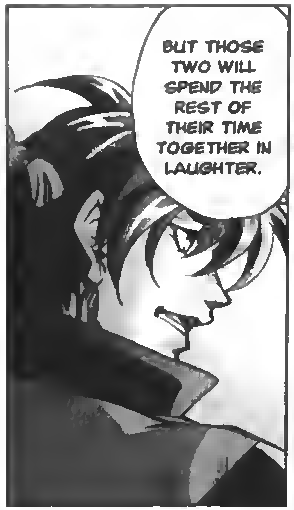
THE NEXT DAY
HERE YOU GO.
THANK YOU.

HEH.


SQUEEZE
LUCKY YOU, KAEDE.
OOOW!
YAY! SHE'S BACK TO NORMAL!
I'll give you some food!
CAN'T... BREATHE...
GET YOUR HANDS OFF HER!


CLAP
THANKS FOR THE MEAL!


えっ?!


BUT THOSE TWO WILL SPEND THE REST OF THEIR TIME TOGETHER IN LAUGHTER.

GOODBYE

YEAH.
I GUESS RINDO WILL BE ALL ALONE ONCE ASAHO DIES.

I'M SURE OF IT.

CHAPTER 4:
JUBOKKO

YOU PICKED UP SOMETHING WEIRD AND ATE IT, DIDN'T YOU?
SPIT IT UP
YOU USUALLY EAT AT LEAST TEN!
IT'S STRANGE TO SEE YOU STOP AT JUST TWO SERVINGS.
ARE YOU SICK, KAEDE?
OH DEAR...
WHAT HAPPENED?
IS IT CONSTIPATION? DIARRHEA?
HOW RUDE! THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME.
SOMETHING MUST BE WRONG.
KAEDE ACTUALLY SOUNDS SENSIBLE.
MAMPE
I'M FINE.
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OK?
WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF MONEY, SO IT'S JUST AS WELL.
HEY!
THAT'S ENOUGH, YOU GUYS.
stop eating everything

SWORD BY THE WORD

IT'S TRUE. WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF MONEY.
THE MONEY I BROUGHT FROM HOME IS GONE, TOO.
SIGH

HELL, THAT'S THE ONLY WAY YOU KARININ CAN MAKE MONEY, ISN'T IT?
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY OTHER SKILLS.

MAYBE WE SHOULD HUNT FOR SOME DEMONS.
YEAH...

THE IWAMI RANGER'S OFFICE SHOULD BE CLOSE BY.
PRETTY MUCH.

WHY YOU?
OH. IF THAT'S THE CASE, I'LL GO.

I CAN HANDLE IT. YOU GUYS WAIT HERE.
ALL WE NEED IS SOMEONE TO CHECK OUT THE BOUNTY NOTICES, RIGHT?
I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.

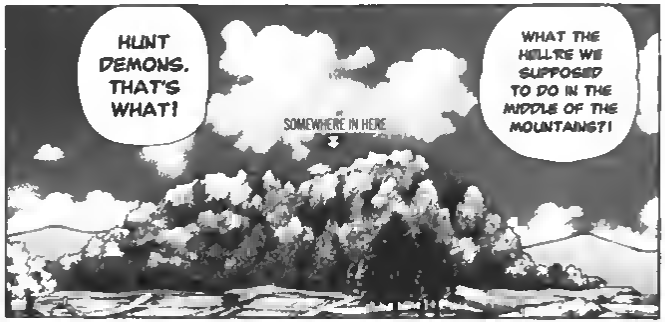
I'M A WOLF, REMEMBER? AND A PUREBLOOD AT THAT.
I'M FASTER THAN ANY OF YOU.

LEAVE IT TO ME. ♡
THANKS.
THAT'D BE GREAT, AOI.

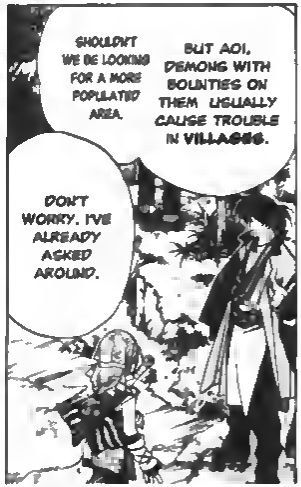
I KNOW!
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO POINT IT OUT.
OR ELSE IT'S OBVIOUS YOU'RE NOT HUMAN.

DON'T FORGET TO HIDE THAT THING HANGING OFF YOUR ASS.
ASS
OOPS.

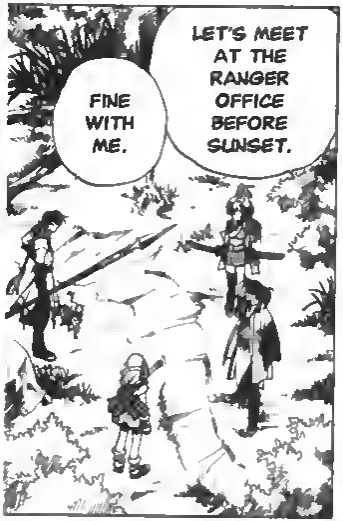
HEY.
WHAT?



SYMBOL "MOUNTAIN"


SHOULDN'T WE BE LOOKING FOR A MORE POPULATED AREA.
BUT AOI, DEMONS WITH BOUNTIES ON THEM USUALLY CAUSE TROUBLE IN VILLAGES.
DON'T WORRY. I'VE ALREADY ASKED AROUND.

IDIOT! WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS AND ASAGI CAN'T FIGHT BECAUSE KAEDE ISN'T AROUND?!
WHAT THEN?
STILL, IT'S NOT LIKE SHE HAS TO STAY CLOSE TO HIM EVERY SECOND OF--


LET'S MEET AT THE RANGER OFFICE BEFORE SUNSET.
FINE WITH ME.

WOW-IT-ALL.
GIVE UP, AOI, SUOH THINK HE'S RIGHT ABOUT EVERYTHING.

OH, NO, SUOH, YOU ALWAYS RIGHT!
I'M WITH YOU 100%.
ARE YOU SAYING I'M WRONG?!

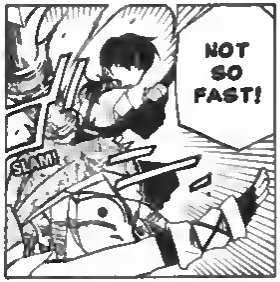
HA HA.
GOOD LUCK
TAKE CARE, ASAGI! BE SAFE!
LET'S GO.

I'LL GO WITH ASAGI!
YAY!

IT'S JUST A COUPLE OF PUNY DEMONS. WE SHOULD SPLIT UP.

FINE. LET'S TRY SEARCHING THIS AREA.

ASAGI WON'T BE ABLE TO USE THE MOEGI IF KAEDE'S AWAY.
YOU'RE PRETTY STUPID.
I'LL KILL YOU!
WHAT'D YOU DO THAT FOR?!
GRRR

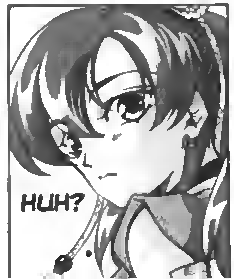

NOT SO FAST!
SLAM!

HEY, WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO? IT'S LIKE YOU'RE EXPLAINING IT TO THE READERS OR SOMETHING.
I AM
WHEN ASAGI DRAWS THE MOEGI, KURENAI GOES INTO KAEDE'S BODY. YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT BY NOW!

I GUESS...
MAYBE WE SHOULD TRY CLOSER TO THE ROAD.

OK.
TELL YOU WHAT. I'LL GO SCOUT THE BUSHES WHILE YOU GUYS TRY THE ROAD.

SILENCE

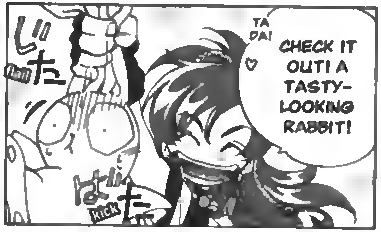

HUH?

GUNK!
DOES THIS MEAN...

WE'VE BEEN AROUND SO MANY OTHER PEOPLE LATELY.
BLUSH
IT'S JUST THE TWO OF US?!

YEAH. IT LOOKS GOOD...
I GUESS YOU'RE MORE INTERESTED IN FOOD
KA KA KA
BLUSH
HUH

HUH?
BOING
ASAGI.


TA DA!
CHECK IT OUT! A TASTY-LOOKING RABBIT!
KICK

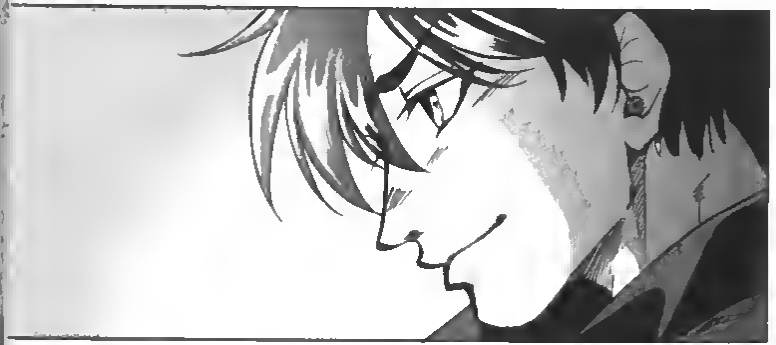
UGH.
I SEE LOTS OF RABBITS.
WIPE

HUH?

I...I DON'T WANNA BE A BURDEN.

WHOA.
TAKE IT EASY.
I CAN WALK.
I'M OK.
STAGGER

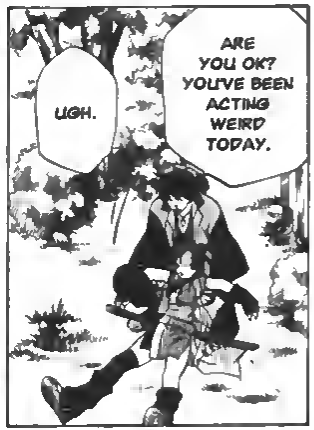
WHAT'S WRONG?
?
I



KAEDE!
hop
hop

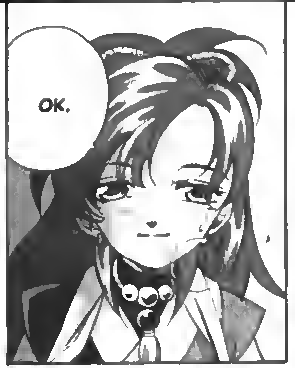
?!
TTWUMP

SPIN-NING?!
EVERY-THING'S SPINNING...


UGH.
ARE YOU OK? YOU'VE BEEN ACTING WEIRD TODAY.

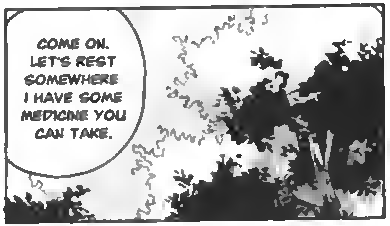
TIP

YOU'RE BURNING UP.


OK.

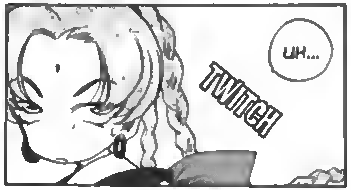
I'M JUST WORRIED ABOUT YOU. DON'T LOOK SO SAD, OK?
YOU'RE NOT A BURDEN.

SHE LOOKS PALE.

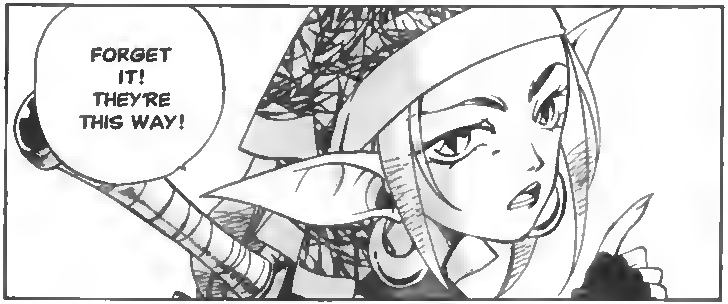

COME ON. LET'S REST SOMEWHERE I HAVE SOME MEDICINE YOU CAN TAKE.

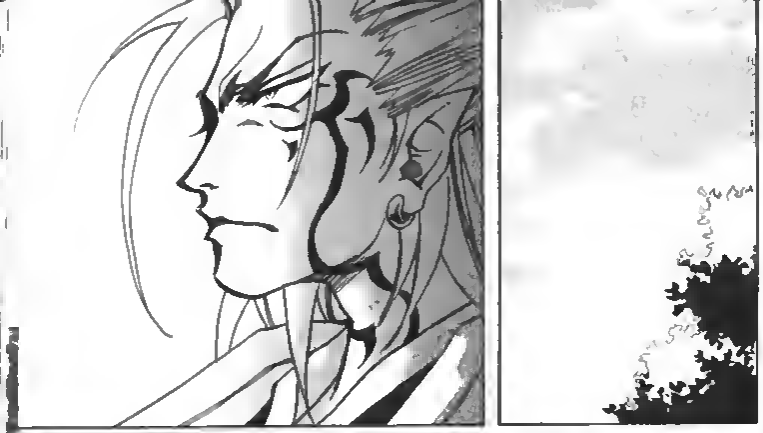
HERE. LET ME CARRY YOU.

scuff


UH...
TWITCH

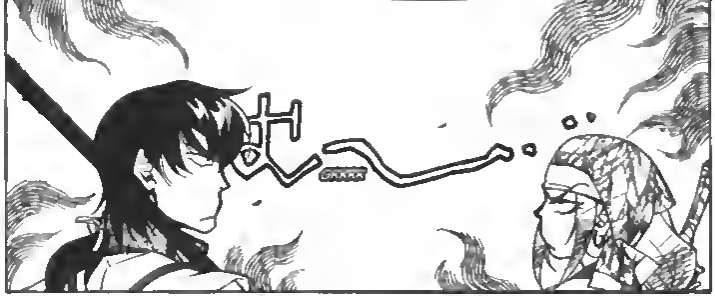
WE SHOULD GO THIS WAY.

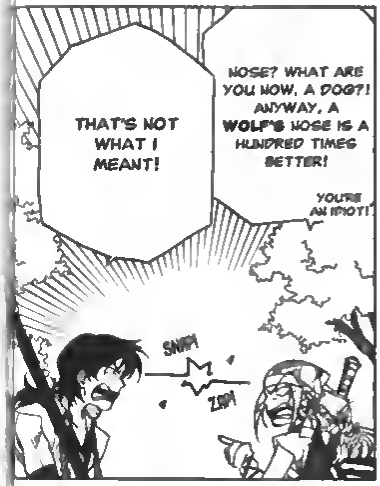

FORGET IT! THEY'RE THIS WAY!



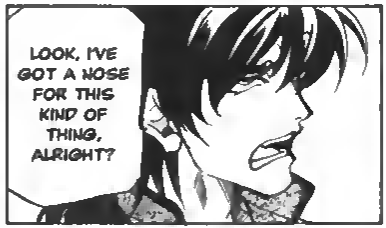
CHIRP
CHIRP

UH-OH. WHERE THE HELL AM I?


GRRRR


THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT!
NOSE? WHAT ARE YOU NOW, A DOG?! ANYWAY, A WOLF'S NOSE IS A HUNDRED TIMES BETTER!
YOU'RE AN IDIOT!
SNIFF
ZIP!

I'M MORE SENSITIVE TO DEMONIC AURAS THAN YOU!

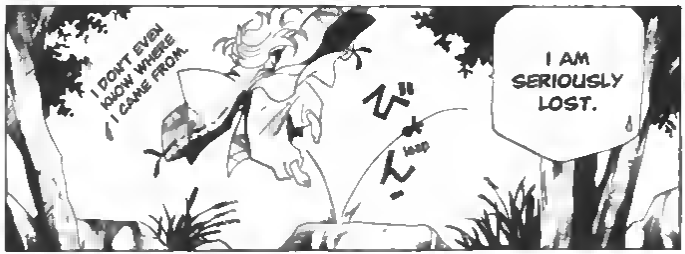

LOOK, I'VE GOT A NOSE FOR THIS KIND OF THING, ALRIGHT?

LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU'RE DONE, ALRIGHT?
YEAH, NICE LANGUAGE. TOOTS REAL LADY-LIKE
MUTT? YOU'RE ONE TO TALK, YOU HAIRY-ASS APE!
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO DOESN'T MAKE SENSE, YOU MANGY MUTT!
THEN WHAT DID YOU MEAN? YOU DON'T MAKE ANY SENSE!

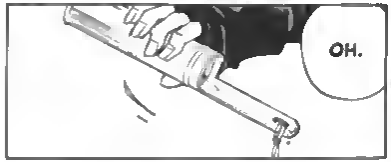
OK.
WAIT HERE. I'LL BE BACK IN A MINUTE.

RUSTLE
?!

MEANWHILE


I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE I CAME FROM.
I AM SERIOUSLY LOST.

OK.
TAKE THIS. IT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER.


OH.

NO.
I'M OUT OF WATER. DO YOU HAVE ANY?

WE PASSED A STREAM A LITTLE WAYS BACK. DIDN'T WE?

SNORT
SNORT
YOU'RE THE IDIOT, IDIOT!
DIDN'T HEAR THE SCREAM
IDIOT! BIG STUPID IDIOT!

DITTO

KAEDE! ARE YOU OK?!
SASH

ASAGI!

WHAT WAS THAT?!

AAUGH!

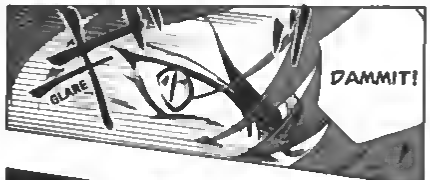
SPLISH

KAEDE?!
THAT VOICE!

DASH

VWOOSH

WOOSH
SWIPE


GLARE
DAMMIT!

SHH

ZUSH

RUSTLE
WHAT THE?!

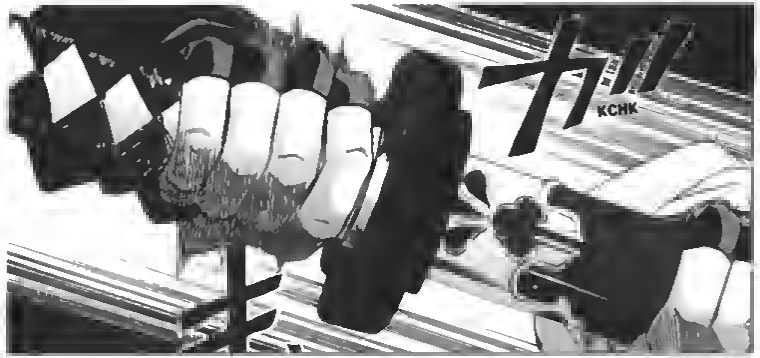
IT LOOKS LIKE THAT TREE'S GOING TO ATTACK!
ATTACK?!

WHAT IS THIS?
IT'S MOVING

*A tree that has tasted human blood. Turning it into a demon. It catches people and sucks their blood.

YOU DAMN TREE!
ZORAK
SKREW

SQUEEZE
LET GO OF HER...
KAEDE!


KCHK

KAEDE!

SQUEEZE
AUGH!

ASAGI...

THUDD
VWOOSH
PKOW

SKSSSH

I'M JUST GETTIN' STARTED.
GRAB

HURRY UP!
SCREECH
THWOMP
IDIOT! THIS IS A JUBOKKO!
BUT KAEDE'S SICK! IF YOU POSSESS HER NOW, SHE COULD DIE!
IF WE DO NOTHING, IT WILL SUCK HER BLOOD AND SHE'LL DIE ANYWAY!

ARE YOU ALRIGHT?!

DO IT, ASAGI!

WOOSH!

FINE. BUT IF SHE DIES BECAUSE OF THIS...

PSHH
THERE'S GONNA BE HELL TO PAY.

VWOOSH
HEH. RIGHT BACK AT YOU.

SHUT UP AND DO IT!
BUT--

MY DAUGHTER'S NO WEAKLING, ASAGI!

grghh
BWAM
STUPID BLOOD-SUCKING TREE.
I GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU!

シャア
HISSSS
SLASH

GRIP
SHIFT
TUTTER
KAEDE'S BODY FEELS HEAVY. SHE'S SO WORN OUT, I CAN'T EVEN DRAW ENOUGH POWER TO SHOOT FIRE.
PANTE
GASPE
PANTE
SCREEECH

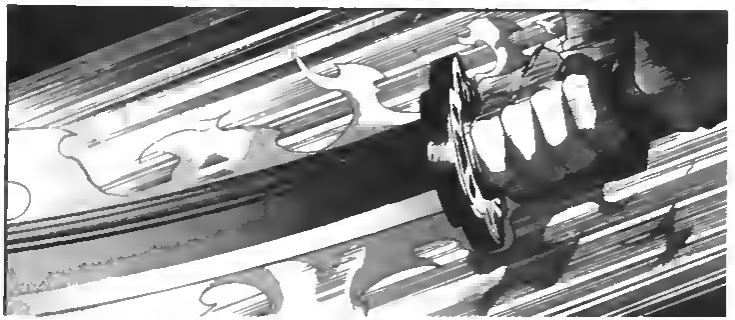
GRIN
AND I DON'T THINK YOU'RE GONNA LIKE IT.
BWOOT
SCREEECH
WOOSH

WALL OF FLAME!
VWOOSH

I'M ALL TAPPED OUT!
DAMN!

SWOOSH

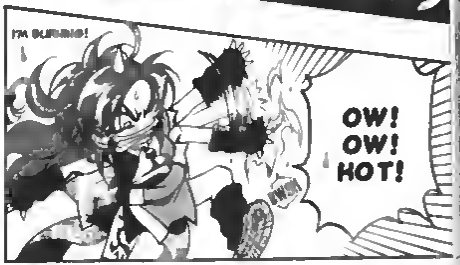
GET BACK!



ASAGI! BEHIND YOU!
WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING?!

VWOOSH

RUSTLE

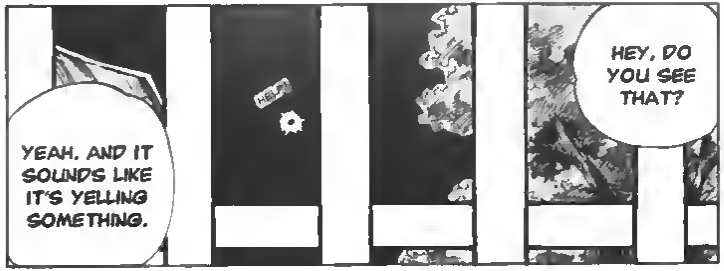

I'M BURNING!
OW! OW! HOT!

GWOOSH

GYAAAAARRGH!
ZGROK
PSHK
CRACK

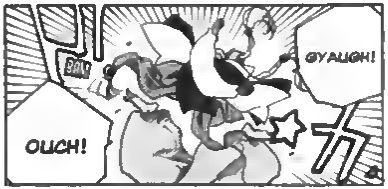
WHAT ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT? IT'S JUST A COLD.
THANK GOODNESS. HER FEVER'S GONE DOWN.
YUP, THIS ONE'S NO WEAKLING. I GUESS SHE TAKES AFTER HER DAD.

RANGER OFFICE — IWAMI BRANCH


HEY, DO YOU SEE THAT?
HELP!
YEAH. AND IT SOUNDS LIKE IT'S YELLING SOMETHING.

HELP!

WHAT HAPPENED, RINRIN? WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?
IT'S AN EMER-GENCY!


GYAUGH!
BANG
OUCH!

UM...
ARE YOU GUYS OK?
Especially Kurama!
THAT HURT!

GRIN
HEH.
OBVIOUSLY.

YEAH...
ANYWAY, WHERE'S EVERYBODY ELSE?
IT'S ALREADY DARK.

DO YOU FEEL THAT? THERE'S SOMETHING COMING

AT LEAST THE BOUNTY FROM THAT JUBOKKO IS ENOUGH TO PAY FOR A DECENT MEAL.
WE DID MAKE OUT PRETTY GOOD.

NO, WHAT IS IT?
LIKE A BALL OF DEMONIC ENERGY IS FLYING TOWARD US.
OR SOMETHING
A BALL?!

POSTSCRIPT

Thank you for buying *By the Sword*. It's taken a while to release volume 2, but I'm happy to say that we finally did it.

The reason for the delay was that we were just short of our page count, and needed one more installment's worth before we could finally publish it. Many of you were kind enough to write in and ask about the status of this volume--and at last, the wait is over!

When this first ran in *Magazine Zero*, there were color pages as well as a color fold-out, which was a refreshing change.

For the graphic novel, we hired a professional designer to do the Table of Contents page, which I'm very pleased with. (I was given two different patterns to choose from, and went with the one you see here because the carp was so pretty.)

The covers for volumes 1 and 2 feature all new illustrations. Let me know what you think!

I also have a homepage, so take a look.
www sanami-matoh.com

Matoh

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

By The Sword Vol. 02

PG. 99 **Dragon kings and mermaids**
While these two would appear to have little in common, they aren't actually as disparate as it initially seems. In Japanese folklore, it's not at all uncommon for dragons to live in the ocean. The story of Urashima Taro, for example, features a dragon king whose palace is located beneath the waves.

PG. 99 **The dragon orb**
In mythology, dragons are often said to be in possession of a pearl or an orb. An example of this is the Chinese folk tale of Xiao Sheng, in which a boy finds a pearl that holds magical properties. When he swallows the pearl and later drinks from a river to quench the terrible thirst that ensues, he transforms into a dragon that brings much-needed rain to his village.

PG. 100 ***Sen***
This monetary unit, now obsolete, was worth about 1/100 of a yen. Mention of it remains in the somewhat colorful phrase *issen mo nai*, which means to not have a penny to one's name (lit. "not even a single *sen*").

PG. 100 **Sinister looks and foxes**
Fox spirits, or *kitsune* in Japanese, possess a variety of magical powers, including the ability to metamorphose at will. They are also regarded as shrewd and beguilers of unsuspecting humans, hence the comment about having a "sinister look." The word *kitsune* is a blanket term encompassing all forms of fox spirits—there are said to be thirteen separate varieties.

PG. 112 ***Kuko***
Kuko are fox spirits generally associated with air or mist. While they are said to be the most wicked of all *kitsune*, Rindo would seem to be the exception to this rule.

SWORD BY THE 2

(Originally published as "YO-U" in Japan.)

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